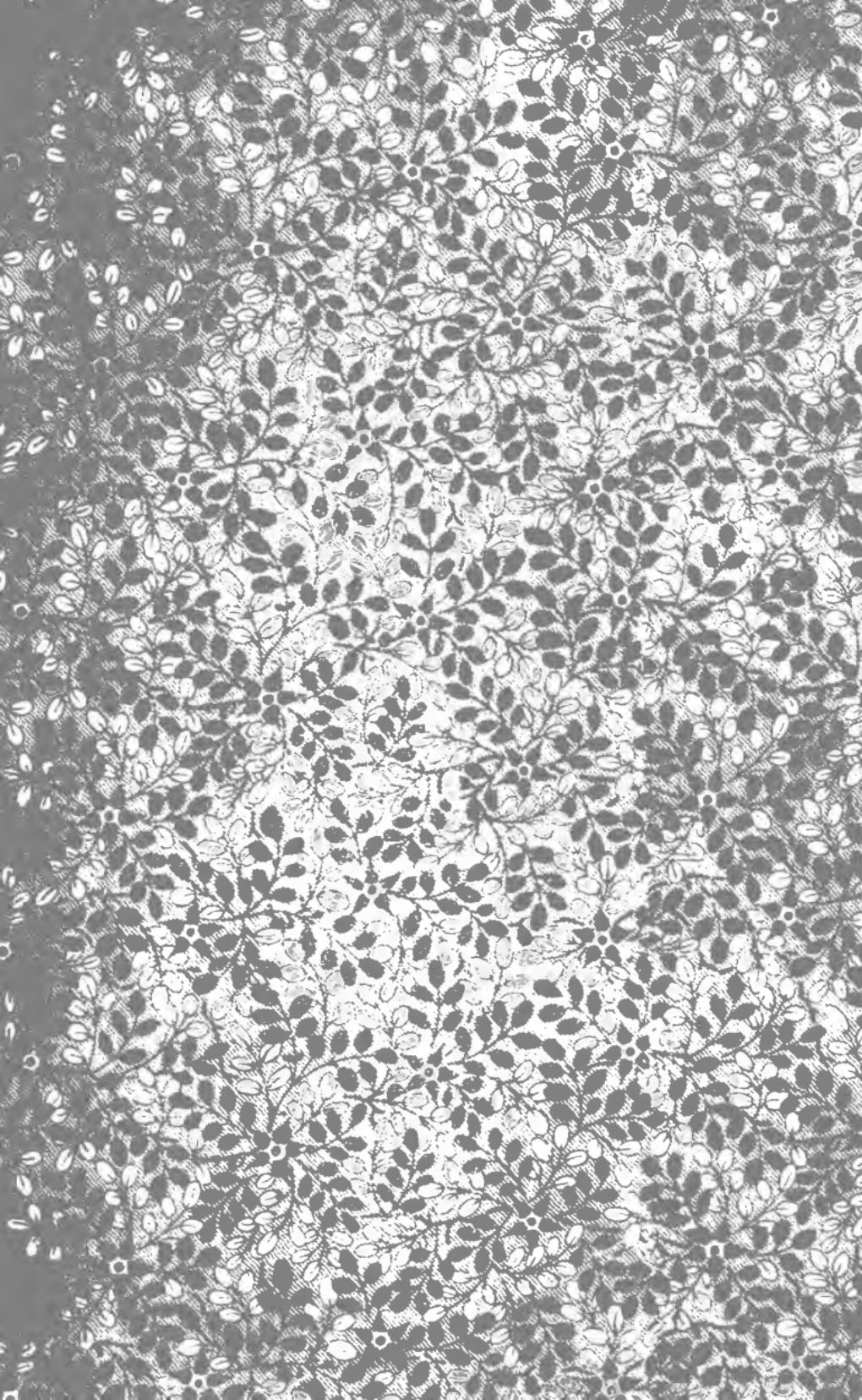


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THE GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL.



THE
GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL.

A Novel.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.
1887.
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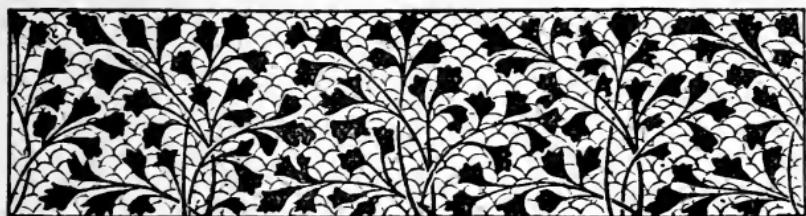


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To the
CITIZENS OF LIVERPOOL
THIS WORK IS
Dedicated,
IN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE KINDLY HOSPITALITY
TO WHICH THE AUTHOR MAINLY OWES
THE OPPORTUNITY OF WRITING IT.

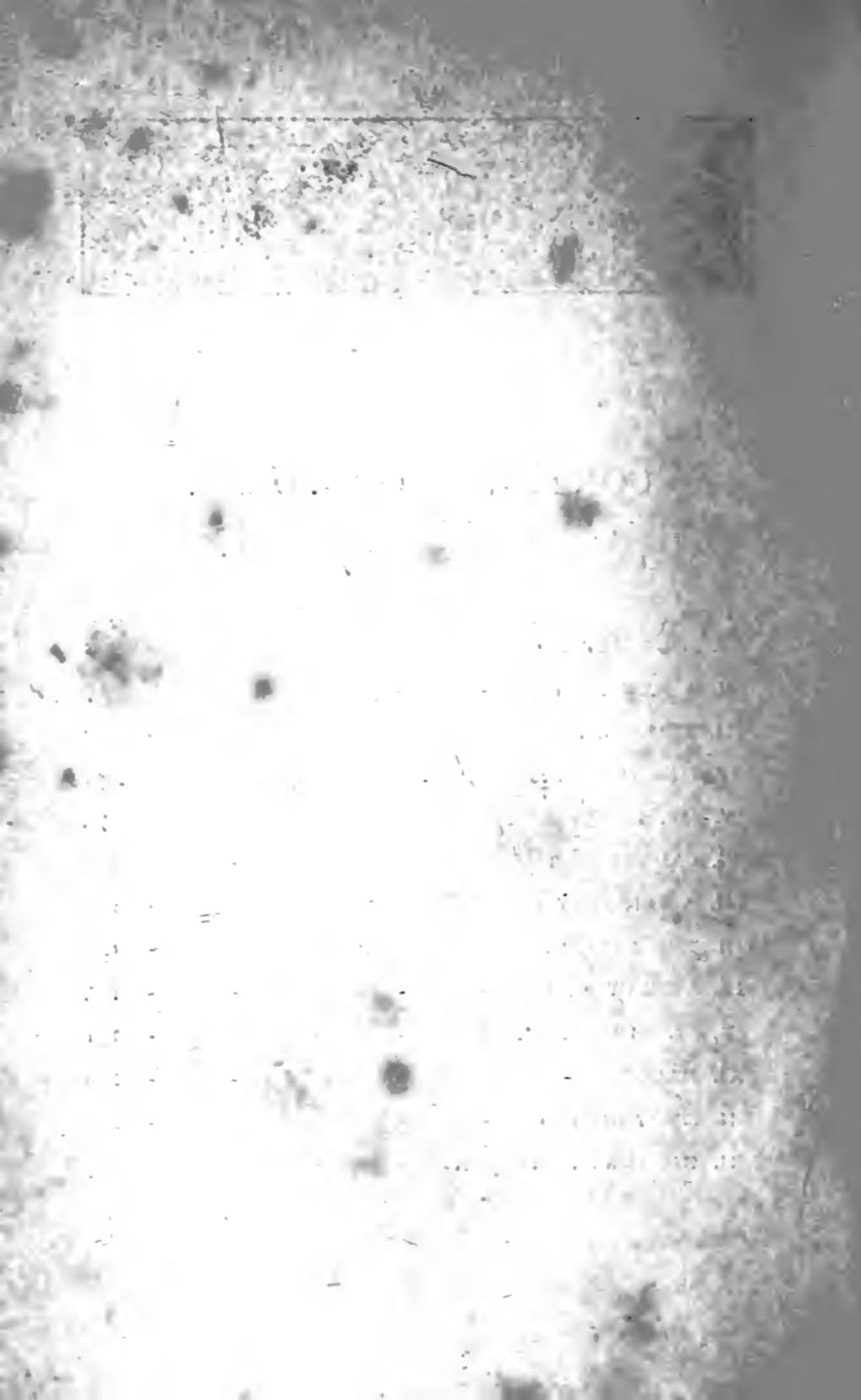
January 25th 1834
M. M. Hale

III. IV.
X. II. III.
IV. V. VI.
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THE
GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL.



CHAPTER I.

SOMERSET HOUSE.

EOR the best part of two centuries, Time, strolling up and down the Strand, has been busily engaged in obliterating almost everything of interest in that thoroughfare. From the Law Courts to Charing Cross no relic of ancient days remains except a Roman Bath and the Royal Chapel of the Savoy, neither of which is properly speaking in the Strand at all, though adjacent to it.

With impartial finger the Old Enemy has

rubbed out stately Palaces, the Inns of the Bishops, the mansions of the old nobility and the picturesque houses richly ornamented with roses, crowns, fleurs-de-lis, and dragons—which, ere they finally disappeared, were converted into shops by an age as utilitarian as our own.

The Three Bridges had vanished long before; though probably a few centuries later than the period when complaint was made about the footway being interrupted by '*thickets and bushes,*' to balance which inconvenience, however, the adventurous traveller from Temple Bar—it was really a bar then, not a gateway—enjoyed on the one hand frequent glimpses of the river, and on the other an almost uninterrupted view of the open country, extending to the pleasant uplands known as Hampstead and Highgate.

Very effectually Time has done his work. Whenever any building more than usually splendid was erected, without delay Time began to pull it down; and the process, if gradual, proved so certain that scarcely one stone remains on another of the palaces where history was made, and the men and women

who furnished so much of England's tragic romance, lived, loved, suffered, smiled, and wept.

Best so, perhaps—for Fancy can re-line the river's bank with stately dwellings and spreading gardens—it can clothe the Past in gayer colours and with fairer face than reality ever wore ; with a wave of its magic wand it can give us back Somerset House in the days when kings and queens feasted there, instead of the desolate picture of a deserted and dilapidated palace, surrounded by dreary grounds, which remained a mournful commentary on the vanity of all earthly hopes till Sir William Chambers swept the edifice away and covered the site with one of the very few handsome buildings modern London can boast.

The old fulfilled its purpose—let it rest. Looking at the past rationally, what did it contain we should desire to recall ?

It was a time of wrong, oppression, hardship, injustice, cruelty, wickedness, and extravagance—a time when might was right ; when the rich lorded it over the poor ; when men lived lives 'twere shame almost to recall ;

when the palaces of kings were less healthy than the dwellings of paupers under Victoria ; when the old houses, exquisitely picturesque, overhanging their foundations, were ‘the receptacles of dirt in every corner of their projecting stories, and the bane of ancient London when the plague with all its attendant horrors frowned destruction on the wretched inhabitants, reserving its forces for the attacks of each returning summer.’

To read and dream about, the former times may have been romantic, stirring, grand, and in some respects great ; but in no broad sense were they good.

Let them go. Not of the old House whence Somerset was taken to the scaffold—which Elizabeth, in ‘her wise economy,’ lent to her cousin Lord Hunsdon, whom she frequently visited within its walls—where Anne of Denmark and her ladies appeared in a constant masquerade, ‘like so many sea-nymphs and nereids,’ in various dresses, ‘to the ravishment of the beholders,’ and later on Henrietta Maria won the struggle for mastery against her husband, while a petty war raged between Hacket, the King’s chaplain, and the Queen’s

confessor as to who should say grace—an indecorous race for precedence often occurring, which was generally terminated by the Protestant chaplain shoving the Catholic priest aside, and the King pulling the dishes to him—do we wish to speak further.

Our story begins in the new Somerset House—handsome without, inconvenient within—once the abode of the Royal Society, jeered at by Hudibras, who charged the members with attempting to

“Search the moon by her own light,
To take an inventory of all
Her real estate and personal ;
To measure wind, and weigh the air,
And turn a circle to a square,
And in the braying of an ass
Find out the treble and the bass,
If mares neigh *alto*, and a cow
In double diapason low.”

The Royal Society have long left it, and the place is now given over to Registers of Births, Registers of Marriages, Registers of Deaths, Registers of Wills, Stamps, Probate, and beyond all things TAXES.

It is with taxes we have to do—with the busy, noisy, rattling, buying, selling,

anxious, rushing Strand of these later days, and the head-quarters where Victoria *Dei Gratia* collects the dues to which she is entitled from her liege subjects.

We shut out the Past—we welcome the Present. The Strand of to-day remains unchanged from the Strand of 1879.

The Inland Revenue Offices situated in Somerset House are in much the same condition as they were on a certain Monday of August in that exceptionally wet year which preceded the eighties.

On that day this story, such as it is, opens.





CHAPTER II.

A NEW RECRUIT.

RAIN! Rain! Rain! It seemed to have been raining for years; the memory of man scarce went back to a time when a bit of blue, broad as a neck-ribbon, was to be discerned in the sky. It had been raining for weeks, for months. Saturday night closed in with a deluge of rain; on Sunday fine weather was prayed for in all churches and chapels to an accompaniment of driving rain heavier, if possible, than any previous dispensation, and now Monday morning had come—Black Monday, with all the cares of the previous seven soaking days on its mind and an infinity of wretched, disastrous days looming darkly through the gloom. Rain! why the Deluge might have been at

hand once more. In the heavens there was no bow set as token of the covenant between God and His earth, and if there had been, no mere mortal could have beheld it. Leaden clouds hung sullenly over the length and breadth of England ; in despair farmers figuratively turned their faces to the wall and gave up the ghost of hope—the hearts of men grew sick by reason of waiting and longing for fine weather. All colour, all scent, all beauty had long before been beaten out of the June roses, while the tall, rich grass was laid and rotted, and now the crops of grain were being ruined : perhaps because we did not ‘ amend our lives ’ no weather was sent to enable us to receive English fruits, or wheat, or barley, or anything else in due season in that awful summer and autumn of 1879.

Who except the babe then unborn and the child then in arms can fail to remember the plagues of rain and waters which in that year came upon us ? Day after day, week after week, the pitiless rain descended ; the Thames was swollen and turbid, the Strand a sea of liquid mud, the fair Thames Valley a district of submerged green fields, yet on

one sad wet Monday morning a young fellow brimful of life, careless of the weather, eager, curious, hopeful, anxious to begin work, confident of success, certain all things would be well with him, walked cheerfully down Drury Lane on his way to Somerset House.

A ‘raw country lad,’ any Londoner looking at his fresh, honest young face would have said; but there was stuff in the lad—good material, waiting to be moulded by circumstances into shape. Under his dripping umbrella truthfulness, high purpose, the determination to do his duty, walked steadily, keeping true time to the buoyant tread of three-and-twenty years free from sin, though not ignorant of sorrow and struggle.

Not a likely youth to take for a hero. Perhaps not, but such as he is he must be taken or left. Very countrified and unsophisticated he certainly seemed. He was by no means handsome, but pleasant and wholesome-looking. He had a complexion clear white, clear red, a good deal freckled—which is a way complexions have when associated with a particular shade of chesnut

hair—eyes of greenish gray, features fairly regular, straight nose, mouth somewhat large, teeth good, no moustache, no whiskers, no beard—nothing in the way of hirsute adornment save a faint light down on his upper lip ; a frank, taking young fellow, who, carrying his five feet ten inches of height erect, strode along the pavement, and who, if he jostled a passer-by, disarmed resentment by a smile which awoke an answering look in the face of almost the churliest old curmudgeon who instinctively turned to swear at his awkwardness.

He had successfully passed his examination ; after hard study and a fierce fight he found himself victor. At three-and-twenty it seems very pleasant to be victorious, especially when victory means needful bread and butter.

In the hour of his success the lad's soft heart yearned after his long dead father and widowed mother, who survived her husband some ten years. She was a true and gentle lady, who, though weak, had made a brave battle with poverty, and brought up her boy to fear God and reverence all things

holy and of good repute, and to know no dread save of sin and disgrace. At that supreme time also memory of much more recent date gave him back another recollection — that of his father's uncle, who had taken the widow and orphan to his own home after Mr. Serle's death, and shared with them the contents of a slender purse. He could see the old man in his cottage overlooking the sea, immersed among his books, dreaming away in curious reading the evening of a once busy life. He had been a naval surgeon, and his two pleasures were to rake the horizon with a telescope and discuss curious passages he had come across in a strange course of desultory reading with the lord of the manor, who was nearly as old and as fine an antique as himself. It was these two who had, after long consultation, decided Selwyn Serle, the raw country lad, must make his way as civil servant to her most gracious Majesty.

‘There is not money sufficient to put you into a profession, my boy,’ said his uncle, ‘and we Serles had always poor heads for business.’

So Selwyn’s little capital was invested in

education, but when it yielded a good return the old uncle was gone where worldly successes matter little.

Never did any young fellow more utterly destitute of relations pace the London pavements. So far as he knew he had not a kinsman living. Three times the pure strong spring of his life had been covered by the salt waves of death—three times the wild sea of trouble had flowed over his soul ; but after many days it had ebbed, and then the waters of his nature had gushed forth again clear, buoyant, and sweet as ever. There had been nothing in his experience to turn his grief to hardness ; kind friends were always near him. The squire's wife closed his mother's eyes, and let him weep the first bitter tears unchecked, her hand clasping his.

In joy and trouble alike friends had been near to sympathize. Their few neighbours were interested in his success and anxious for his welfare. Seacourt had been to him a second home, and no difference was made between him and the sons of the house. He knew they were born to riches and he to

poverty ; but the world was open to him, and he would have been but a poor fellow had he gone out into it with a sulky face and a discontented temper.

There was no mystery in his past—no mystery in the past of man or woman belonging to him. The Serles had never been great nor grand, but they had been honest and self-respecting. There was not a single page of shame in the family annals, not a blurred or blotted name in the simple record.

These, then, were the traditions of that poor cheery lad's life as we first see him walking through the pouring rain to Somerset House, which represented to him the Temple of Fortune.

He had achieved distinction, he had won a coveted prize—he had passed his examination for Civil Service Clerkships, Grade I. He was going to serve her Majesty very faithfully, and compass much good fortune.

To such a young man, so lucky, so hopeful, so content, what could deluges of rain signify ? Why nothing, though out of some vague feeling of loyalty to the Queen, one of whose servants he considered himself,

he had donned his best suit and newest hat. In good spirits he passed down Newcastle Street and through Drury Court, and straight across the Strand to Somerset House, the gates of which stood hospitably open to receive him. After passing under the central archway he paused for a moment irresolute, then turned to the right. Above a doorway facing the great quadrangle he saw the words ‘Inland Revenue: Tax Branch’ inscribed in large gold letters. Her Majesty’s latest civil recruit concluded this was the entrance to the office of which he was in search, but to put the matter beyond doubt he asked a stout, red-faced policeman standing at the door where he should find ‘Room 66.’ The policeman was listening to a good story told him by an equally stout brother officer, whose long black beard was quivering with suppressed enjoyment of his joke, and answered tetchily :

‘First turn to the left, then to the right, up the staircase to the top, and then ask again.’

As Selwyn left them the story was at once

resumed, and before he had turned the corner ‘to the left’ the corridor resounded with a terrific guffaw, and a sound as if Gog and Magog had both slapped their knees at once.

With this sound ringing in his ears Selwyn climbed the staircase ‘to the top,’ and found himself in a corridor from which numberless doors opened. As is usual in Somerset House, no one chanced to be in sight of whom to ‘ask again,’ but with a little trouble he found the room of which he was in search, and announced his advent with a modest knock. There came no answer. He repeated the knock; there still came no reply, though voices could be distinguished in the office. After two more vain efforts to attract attention Selwyn opened the door and entered.

He found himself behind a screen, artfully arranged so as to cut off the slightest draught, though as the office door itself was lined with list, this precaution seemed almost superfluous. Advancing beyond the cover of the screen, he saw a young man dressed in a blue serge coat and waistcoat, very light trousers, white gaiters, and a red necktie. This individual had just taken a sheet of paper from a boy

who stood at his side, and lounging back in his chair, surveyed it critically as Selwyn advanced.

'Pray, sir, sit down,' said he, without rising. Selwyn accepted the invitation.

'I have a letter,' he began, 'directing me——'

'One moment,' the other interrupted; 'I will attend to you directly. Here, Whalley, this is much straighter, isn't it?'

Mr. Whalley rose from a desk on the opposite side of the room, near the window, and leaned over his friend's shoulder to examine the document.

'That's very neat indeed!' said Whalley.
'Who was working the machine, Hilton?'

'I was; I knew Raikes didn't half attend to what he was doing. Look!' added Mr. Hilton, holding out the page at arm's length, and contemplating it with affectionate admiration, while he read aloud, 'Cobbleton Hilton, Esq., Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue.' 'That type-writer's a deuced useful kind of thing.'

'Chairman of the Board, eh? Did you hear that?' cried Whalley, appealing to the

other men in the room ; ‘modest, isn’t he?’ and there ensued a general chuckle.

‘Pooh, pooh, pooh!’ said Mr. Hilton, turning at the same time to our hero with an inquiring look.

Selwyn gave him the letter which he had previously mentioned, and Mr. Hilton read it through carefully twice. Then, having apparently by a great effort of mind mastered its contents, and made a note of the official number in the top left-hand corner, he proceeded to inquire :

‘Have you been medically examined, Mr. Serle?’

‘No,’ replied Selwyn, in some astonishment, ‘the letter, I think, states I come here for that purpose.’

Mr. Hilton took the letter up, and read it through again.

‘Ah! so it does!’ exclaimed he, as if Selwyn’s answer had thrown a new and valuable light upon the contents; ‘then I suppose I must give you a line to the medical officer,’ and suiting the action to the word he drew a sheet of paper towards him and commenced writing.

Before, however, Mr. Hilton had finished the second line of his letter a door leading to another inner-room opened, and a very stout man, dressed in a suit of violent checked tweed, and bearing in his hand a shovel, made his appearance.

'Hullo, Dent,' exclaimed Mr. Hilton, turning round and throwing down his pen, 'what have you there?'

'Come here, Hilton; come here, Whalley,' said the stout man jovially, advancing towards the fireplace. 'I want to show you this. It's a new kind of fuel invented by a friend of mine. I got a sample of it by post this morning; and I've been trying to light it for the last two hours, but the d—d thing won't catch. I suppose I haven't quite got the knack of it yet.'

He deposited the shovel in the fender, and the three men clustered round it. Mr. Hilton took up a little piece of the patent fuel, pinched it, smelt it, touched it with his tongue, carried it to the light to examine it more closely, and finally shook his head and replaced it in the fender without speaking.

'Don't, Whalley, don't, man!' cried Mr.

Dent, repressing that gentleman's inconvenient zeal, 'if it catches suddenly it will go all up my sleeve. There, that's better !'

Meanwhile Mr. Hilton was steadily striking matches and applying them to the fuel, but with very little result.

' You've got it wet, haven't you ?' he asked at last.

' Wet ? No !' replied his friend, ' and if I had I've struck matches enough to dry it.'

' H'm !' said Mr. Hilton, doubtfully and ruefully gazing at the pile of extinct matches littering the hearth.

' Here,' said Whalley, ' I know what to do Give me another box of lights.'

Hilton handed him one, and he proceeded to build up a structure of matches, laying them crosswise in a square. When the erection was as high as he considered safe he laid a piece of the patent fuel gingerly on the top, and applied a light to the four corners of the square. A flame at once shot up, and the fuel showed signs of ignition.

' See ! see !' cried Dent excitedly, ' give me some paper !'

He looked round, and snatching the un-

finished epistle lying on Mr. Hilton's desk, screwed it up and held it in the flame to increase the heat.

'Hang it all,' Mr. Hilton said in an injured tone. 'I say, Dent, I'd only just begun that letter.'

'Never mind, what *does* it matter, my dear fellow?—the fuel's catching : by Jove it is !'

All at once, with a loud fizzing noise, the fuel did catch. A thick sulphurous smoke rose from it, and, the register of the grate being closed, was wafted out into the room. The smoke grew thicker and more choking every instant, and the three men were forced to retire from the fireplace. Holding his handkerchief to his mouth, Mr. Hilton gasped out :

'Damn it, Dent; you needn't go making such a stench as that here.'

Mr. Dent looked rather injured, but made no retort. He retreated with Whalley to the window, and began to talk to him in a low tone. Mr. Hilton coughed several times, and, resuming his seat, said politely to Selwyn :

'I am sorry to detain you, Mr. Serle ; but,

as you saw, the letter which I had commenced to write was accidentally destroyed by my friend over there ;' then taking up another sheet of paper he completed and addressed a letter to—

THEOPHILUS OLIVE, Esq., M.D.,
237, Henrietta Street,
Covent Garden.

'I must ask you to present this personally to Dr. Olive, and to bring back his reply,' Mr. Hilton observed in his most courteous manner, and handing the note to Selwyn, immediately possessed himself of a yellow-backed novel, which occupied a conspicuous position in one of the pigeon-holes of his desk, and settling his chair comfortably, became immersed in '*Under Two Flags*.'

Dr. Olive's waiting-room was full when Selwyn reached it, and nearly an hour passed before he was admitted to the presence of a kindly old gentleman, with an abstracted wandering expression of countenance, who listened with a stethoscope to his breathing, requested him to articulate the words 'ninety-

nine' distinctly, and listened again ; inquired whether he had had the measles, of what his father, mother, and all his relations for two generations had died ; professed the greatest regard for Mr. Hilton, whom he characterized as an energetic young man, sure to rise in his office ; congratulated Selwyn on having obtained so good an appointment ; told him that all young men ought to work hard ; recommended fish-bones as a nutritious diet ; detained him in all exactly seven minutes, and sent him away wishing him every prosperity.

When Selwyn, armed with the note Dr. Olive had entrusted to him, returned to Room 66 he found it empty, save for the presence of a young boy, who appeared to find time hanging heavily on his hands and informed him that Mr. Hilton had gone out to lunch, adding the advice that Selwyn might as well go too. Nothing loth, Selwyn availed himself of the hint, and returned in about an hour to find Mr. Hilton busily engaged in arranging a large mass of papers.

‘ Ah ! ’ he said, ‘ glad you’ve come, Mr. Serle. There are your papers, and I want

to take you down to see the Chief-Inspector.
Is that Dr. Olive's letter ?'

Selwyn handed him the note.

' Very satisfactory,' remarked Mr. Hilton, after glancing over it. ' Queer old fellow, isn't he ? Did he advise you to dine on fish-bones ?'

' He said he thought fish-bones a very nutritious diet.'

' Ah, he tells everybody that. Now, Mr. Serle, will you write a short account of yourself, so that we may know something about you ? What pens do you use ?' placing before the new comer a huge bundle of quills.

' I don't think I quite understand what you want me to do.'

' Oh ! very simple matter ! Just tell us where you were born, educated, and so on. What prizes and scholarships you got, and who your college tutor was, and anything else you think is likely to interest us.'

And this is what Selwyn Serle wrote :

' I was born at Brompton Ralph, in Somersetshire, on the 7th April, 1856. My father was curate of that parish for

fifteen years. He died when I was twelve years old, and my mother then removed to Seacourt, near Minehead. I was educated at Blundell's School, Tiverton, where I gained the Latin verse prize in 1874. I read for the Civil Service with the Rector of Seacourt. I am an only child, all my relatives are dead, and my great-uncle, with whom I lived at Seacourt, served at the Battle of the Nile.'

'Thank you! That is just what we want,' said Mr. Hilton politely, as he took the paper from Selwyn's hands. 'Now I think we had better go down and see Mr. Dandison.'

'Who is he?' inquired Selwyn.

'That, my dear fellow, is one of the things which will be borne in upon you rather forcibly before you have adorned the Inland Revenue Department very many weeks. One thing can safely be said for Dandison: he leaves the imprint of his own individuality upon everyone who comes near him.'

'That sounds rather dubious,' Selwyn remarked.

'Well! you will have your own oppor-

tunities of judging. I'll tell you all you need to know about him at present as we go down.'

Mr. Hilton gathered up his papers, and as they wound their way through a labyrinth of corridors and staircases to the Chief-Inspector's Room, he gave Selwyn the following pieces of information :

Mr. Dandison, the Chief-Inspector, entered the service when very young. As an Assistant-Surveyor, and afterwards as a Surveyor, he was remarkable for the zeal and for the avidity with which he pounced upon the driest details of his official work and mastered them. However complicated a case might be, however elaborately cooked the accounts which accompanied it, though successive Surveyors might have shaken their heads over it, and Inspectors winked and been content to let it rest, Mr. Dandison seized it, so to speak, between his teeth, and worried the matter till he had extracted something comprehensible out of it. It is true his detractors whispered that his cleverness was really only cunning, and that plausible as his suggestions might be, they were

often unjust, and only accepted on account of the easy means which they furnished for disposing of difficult cases. It was said that his rapid promotion over the heads of his seniors was not wholly due to direct recognition of his merit, but to backstairs influence, and to a tongue which never lacked a clever inuendo against a rival. The successful man can despise his detractors ; it is only when one is falling in the world that the hits begin to tell.

Mr. Dandison was successful. The most important districts were assigned to him while he was still young, and while older men of equal merit, but lacking audacity, were eating their hearts away in sleepy country towns, hoping for promotion which never came for quiet, honest work. Not many years had passed over his head when Mr. Dandison became an Inspector—the hardest, most inquisitive and merciless of Inspectors. No one was better hated among his old companions the Surveyors ; but from this time the man's personality made itself felt in the service. His headquarters were now at Somerset House, and though he frequently

darted down into the country upon some inquisitorial raid, he was always at hand to lay his 'great practical experience' at the service of his chiefs. So that when the Chief-Inspector resigned, the promotion of Mr. Dandison to the vacant post was hardly felt as a change, since he had long wielded the real power which the position bestowed.

'The right man for the post,' his chiefs said, and Mr. Dandison agreed with them. Impassive and mechanical, he used his authority like a scourge. He was indeed a model civil servant. In course of time he bought a smug villa at Finchley, which he furnished according to the correctest principles of the modern æsthetical no-taste, and became at once vastly respected in the neighbourhood.

On the sunniest life, however, there falls some shadow—no garden-wall, face it the south never so well, ripens all its peaches. Mr. Dandison had a brother. This in itself must have proved a misfortune, unless the brother had been cast in the same uncompromising mould as the Chief-Inspector. Unfortunately, in addition to total dissimi-

larity of nature, Dandison junior (he was junior) was a literary man of Bohemian tastes, dwelt in a pretty house overlooking Regent's Park, and wrote—not steady works, but novels—‘larky’ novels! Novels which told wild stories of Epsom, Homburg, and Monte Carlo; novels which the fastest men could read in bed on Sunday morning with pleasure; novels which were eagerly devoured by the younger clerks in Somerset House, but before which Mr. Dandison himself recoiled in horror. It was not that the comparatively loose morality of the books really shocked him—his brother might have broken every commandment of the ten, and Mr. Dandison would have borne the knowledge meekly, as long as the world was not taken into confidence. But that the big world outside Somerset House, as well as the little world within, should speak of him as ‘Bob Dandison’s brother,’ and that some part of the novelist’s slangy reputation should extend to him in consequence, was a sore affliction. He tasted the dregs of the cup of bitterness on a certain day when a lady, well known in fashionable society, called on

him under the impression that he was *the* Dandison—his own brother.

'Imagine, my dear,' she said with pardonable warmth, when retailing the circumstance to her bosom friend; 'imagine my disgust to find not our Dandison, but only a tax-man!'

'So, Mr. Serle,' this high functionary commented, reading from our hero's autobiography, after Mr. Hilton had introduced him and departed, 'so you were born at Brompton Ralph? A very lovely part of a very lovely county. Your lines fell in pleasant places when you were a mere child. And you went from there to Minehead—pleasant again; and from Minehead to Tiverton—pleasanter still; and from Tiverton you come to the Inland Revenue, pleasantest perhaps of all. Really, Mr. Serle, you are a very fortunate young man. I am delighted to make your acquaintance.'

The Chief-Inspector shook hands so warmly, that Selwyn felt Mr. Hilton must have misjudged him, and not to lag behind in courtesy, he said he thought so too, and that he hoped eventually to rise in the service.

‘There is,’ said Mr. Dandison pompously, as if he were speaking for the information of the British Empire, instead of for that of an insignificant Assistant-Surveyor of Taxes, ‘there is no branch of the Public Service so open as the Inland Revenue to recognise and reward merit. You have a great career before you, Mr. Serle, and I can assure you that I shall always in an especial degree watch your progress with interest.’

Selwyn thanked him gratefully, and inquired in what part of England he was to be stationed.

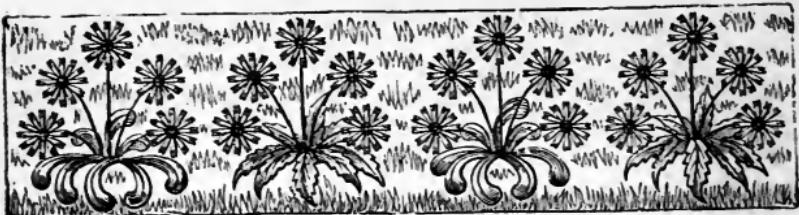
‘Is there any place for which you have a preference?’ asked the Chief-Inspector, consulting a register, and running his fingers down the page. ‘There is a vacancy at Edinburgh, but I fancy that will be otherwise filled up. And there is one at Liverpool. Should you like to go to Liverpool, Mr. Serle?’

It was courteous of the Chief-Inspector to put the matter as if the decision rested with his subordinate; very courteous indeed, because he had already decided that, whether Mr. Serle liked it or not, to Liverpool he should go.

Selwyn replied that he was prepared to travel to any part of the country where he might be sent, which reply was much commended by Mr. Dandison. The interview then terminated, after Selwyn had received a letter he was advised to present as soon as possible to

MARTIN TROSDALE, ESQ.,
Surveyor of Taxes,
Liverpool 3.





CHAPTER III.

THIRD LIVERPOOL.

IT was pouring in torrents when, on the day following his interview with Mr. Dandison, Selwyn found himself and his fortunes pacing the Liverpool streets. He had obeyed his instructions literally. He packed his portmanteau on Monday night, and early on Tuesday was ready for the road. No delay or hesitation about Mr. Serle ! Eager and ready for work, his Somerset House experiences, so far from damping his ardour, had raised it to tropical heat.

Everybody had been good to him—very ; especially the Chief-Inspector. He retained a pleasant memory even of the boy in charge. London chanced to be in one of her genial

moods on the wet Monday when this story opens—she has her bad moods, which are nasty as moods can be—but so far Selwyn's experience of them was nil.

He might, for instance, have gone to Somerset House on a morning when every man he spoke to had got out of the wrong side of his bed—when no one knew anything, or would do anything, or be civil about anything. We have all had our turn of that sort of contrariness, concerning which we feel we should prefer to keep silence for the remainder of our lives.

The offices in Somerset House he had been so fortunate as to visit were, it is true, as unlike his pre-conceived ideas of offices devoted to the work of carrying on a Government as Messrs. Whalley, Dent, Hilton, and Co., from the stiff, insolent, unapproachable young man, well-tied up with yards of red tape, he had expected to answer his modest application with frigid haughtiness; but his disappointment in these respects was by no means disagreeable, and nothing could have been homelier than the greeting of the great Government beehive—shall I say? (though

that term is not quite accurate)—to this latest probationer, nothing easier than the ways and manners of the subordinates, young and old, who were good enough to take her Majesty's pay.

'And no doubt,' Mr. Serle thought, 'spite of all their larking and chaffing, they get through an enormous amount of work when they set themselves to it. If the fellows at Liverpool are only like Mr. Hilton, I shall consider myself quite in Fortune's good books. I did not expect to find things so pleasant, certainly.'

It was this satisfied and thankful mood which shortened the journey to Lancashire, and made even the Liverpool streets, seen through a deluge of rain, attractive. He had left a steady downpour behind him at Euston; all the way torrents beat upon the carriage roof and dashed against the windows, while when he arrived in Liverpool it seemed as though the Mersey had selected that particular day for making a little pleasure excursion through most of the thoroughfares; but to Selwyn these little drawbacks signified nothing. In a good temper with the world and himself, he left his luggage at the

terminus, and set out to find Martin Trosdale, Esq., Surveyor of Taxes.

Outside Lime Street Station he asked a policeman if he could direct him to the offices of which he was in search.

‘You must go to the Custom House,’ was the reply.

‘And where is the Custom House?’ inquired Selwyn.

‘Straight before you,’ and the young Assistant-Surveyor, guided by a wave of his informant’s hand, crossed in front of St. George’s Hall, and under a deluge of rain strode along to his destination, which proved to be in the very heart of Liverpool, close to the Docks. There, in the midst of a labyrinth of streets through which a motley crowd of lounging sailors is continually passing, stands the Custom House, a huge stone building, which in addition to other attractions boasts two porticoes, one facing due east, the other due west.

The vast edifice is crowned by a tottering dome which costs the Corporation for repairs annually almost as much as is harvested in rates from the district surrounding it.

In this pile the greater part of the Government offices were formerly located, the portion devoted to the Inland Revenue being approached by an immense doorway under the eastern façade.

The quarter of Liverpool in which the Custom House stands is neither picturesque nor cheerful. In spite of the pleasant airs which sometimes blow up from the river, a perpetual grime seems to hang about it. The Sailors' Home, from which it is divided only by a narrow street, overshadows the building; and the throng of sailors, with their following of dirty women, hawkers, and fruit merchants, make up a scene which, to put the matter mildly, is not captivating. The doorway which gives access to the Inland Revenue offices possesses the quality of squalor in a more marked degree than the rest of the building. Its steps reek with a perpetual moisture, the walls of the lobby within are of a dark nondescript colour which baffles every effort to discover its original hue; and the staircase leading to the offices winds gloomily aloft, till it seems to lose itself in darkness.

As Selwyn Serle climbed up these stairs on the dreary afternoon of the day after his introduction to Mr. Dandison, he did not escape the influences of the place. He had not formed a clear mental picture of what a provincial tax-office would be like; and his experience of Somerset House on the previous day had so far upset his ideas about Government offices in general that he refrained, on his journey down to Liverpool, from anticipation. Nor did he now indulge in any, though the way in which he whistled softly to himself as he glanced round, and pursued his way upstairs, was eminently suggestive of astonishment.

At the top of the staircase he was confronted by a swing-door; pushing it open, he found himself in a long corridor, on which many offices opened. To his right hand the wall was dead, but to the left another dark gallery turned off; and Selwyn paused, in doubt which to take. It was past two o'clock —a time at which he had supposed office work would be in full progress; yet he stood hesitating at the juncture of the passages for five minutes without seeing a sign of life.

At last he decided to follow the passage which lay before him ; but at the same instant a door at the further end opened, and a stout man came out bareheaded, and advanced towards him with a heavy, rolling gait. Before Selwyn could speak, however, he dived suddenly into another room, the door of which he banged after him. The new Assistant tapped at the door, but received no reply.

‘ Deuce take it !’ he thought, ‘ I may wander about these corridors all day. This is a public office, not an enchanted castle,’ and without more ado he pushed the door open boldly, and entered the room.

A strange sight met his eyes—a sight so strange he could only stand and stare. Close to the window—thickly grimed with the dust of years—stood the fat man, already stripped to his shirtsleeves, holding up to the light what appeared to be a very grimy white waistcoat. Beside him was an office washstand, and a basin half full of soapy water, with which he clearly intended to restore the waistcoat to as much of its original tint as age had left it. A round-backed chair stood near at hand, on

which were arranged several other articles of underclothing, in process of drying. Selwyn had hardly time to take in these details, when the stout man turned furiously upon him, puffing out his cheeks, and drawing up his squat figure with an air of ludicrous pomposity.

‘How dare you, sir, enter a private office in this outrageous way?’ he sputtered.

‘I beg your pardon,’ Selwyn answered. ‘I should not have come in had the door been marked “private.”’

‘It is not marked “public,” at any rate; and you have been guilty of a piece of gross impertinence—gross, sir!’

‘The sooner you put up some sort of notice the better then,’ retorted Selwyn. ‘Where all the doors are so much alike, you can hardly expect strangers to know by instinct they are straying into the official laundry.’

‘You are an insolent fellow,’ said the stout man, glaring in an absurd way over the waistcoat, which he held before him like a shield. ‘Let me tell you that tone won’t do with me.’

‘I am quite innocent of any wish to have

to do with you,' was the reply. 'I regret having intruded, and I will go now.'

'You had best, if you do not want to be put out. In all my experience I never met with such a ruffian.'

'Good-day,' answered Selwyn, laughing. 'I won't say good-bye, for perhaps I may see you again when I want my clothes washed, though the laundry does not seem very well appointed. Appearances, however, are often deceitful.'

'If I were younger I would undeceive you, sir, in a way you would not relish,' said the fat man venomously, his red face paling with passion. 'As it is, I will send for the police unless you take yourself off at once.'

'Pray do not disturb the police. I dare say they are asleep, like most of the people in this place,' mocked Selwyn amiably. 'Good-day, again. Next time we meet, I hope you will be in a better humour,' and he turned to the door, which was closed behind him with a bang which echoed along the gloomy corridor as the sound of the policemen's merriment had resounded up the staircase at Somerset House.

'What an extraordinary first experience,' thought the Assistant-Surveyor, as he stood on the mat and heard the door locked and double-locked behind him. "'God beginynge maketh god endynge,'" quoth Hendynge. 'Let us go a little further.'

He proceeded on his way down the gallery, and came to a door on which was painted 'Mr. Thos. Rowcroft,' the opposite one being adorned with the name of 'Mr. William Sutton.' A few steps further, and he stopped before a door on the left, on which was inscribed 'Mr. Martin Trosdale.' Knocking gently, he waited some time for a reply; but, save an indistinct murmur, which appeared to be continuously going on in the room, there was no response. His late experience made him diffident, so he tapped a second time, and again waited; but, as there was still no answer, he opened the door, and then paused, expecting an invitation to enter. Finding no invitation came, however, he took courage and stepped across the threshold.

He found himself in a little pew-like enclosure, formed by a counter, which cut off access to the office. The room was remark-

ably small superficially, but very lofty, and had the appearance of being formed, as was, in fact, the case, by taking away a portion of the fine central hall of the building, in which the clerical work of the Customs was carried on. A partition of wood and glass, rather higher than a man's stature, divided the office nearly into two, the outer portion being almost completely filled by a large writing-desk, and an enormous cupboard, with several sliding doors.

There was no one in the outer office ; but Selwyn heard a noise from behind the partition, as if some person had been disturbed by his entry, but as that person did not appear he rapped upon the counter with his umbrella.

‘ Is anyone there ? ’ asked a peevish voice.

‘ There is,’ replied Selwyn.

‘ What do you want ? ’

‘ I wish to see Mr. Trosdale.’

‘ I am Mr. Trosdale,’ replied the voice, in a tone which seemed to imply, ‘ Now that you hear how utterly weary I am, and how unfit to come out and interview you, don’t you think you had better go away ? ’

but as Selwyn did not take this hint, the peevish voice continued, ‘ Is it something about taxes ?’

‘ Well, yes. I am the bearer of a letter from Mr. Dandison.’

‘ Oh, indeed,’ and then a chair seemed to be pushed back, and Mr. Trosdale himself came round the partition. ‘ Then you are Mr. Serle, my new Assistant,’ he said in quite a changed tone. ‘ I am glad to see you. Pray come in.’

Mr. Trosdale was a tall, largely made man, of a slovenly habit. His shoulders drooped, and his arms swung loosely down, as if he had but little control over them. His head was slightly bowed, and his gray hair long, thin, and unkempt ; his blue eyes were faded and sunken ; his whiskers ragged ; his complexion was sallow, and he evidently had not summed up sufficient energy that day to shave. His face, indeed his whole figure, was stamped with the superscription of discontent and disappointment.

These observations the newly-appointed Assistant-Surveyor made in the act of accepting his chief’s invitation to enter the inner

office. Mr. Trosdale placed a chair for him, and wearily seating himself, asked :

‘ Had you a pleasant journey ?’

‘ Fairly so, considering the weather.’

‘ And do you like Liverpool ?’

‘ I have hardly been here an hour yet,’ Selwyn replied ; ‘ but I have no doubt I shall like it well enough.’

‘ You only came to-day ?’ Mr. Trosdale asked with some surprise.

‘ I left London this morning, and came here direct. Mr. Dandison gave me to understand his letter was urgent.’

‘ Yes ?’ And Mr. Trosdale broke the seal of the letter and glanced over it. ‘ Mr. Dandison speaks highly of your ability, Mr. Serle,’ he remarked ; ‘ he says he is confident I shall find you most useful.’

‘ He is very kind.’

‘ Where were you stationed before coming here ? No doubt you have had considerable experience of the work in a tax-office.’

‘ I have had no such experience. I am only newly appointed,’ answered Selwyn innocently.

‘ Good God !’ exclaimed Mr. Trosdale ;

'this is desperate! Do you mean to say that Dandison has, spite of all my remonstrances, again sent me an inexperienced Assistant?'

'It would appear so, certainly. Does he not say as much in his letter?'

'Not a word of it!' the Surveyor groaned. 'Well, this *is* too bad!' He fell back in his chair and glanced piteously at Selwyn, who began to feel as uncomfortable as if his inexperience were a crime. 'For years,' the Surveyor went on solemnly, 'ever since I was first appointed, I have been in Dandison's black books. He killed my poor father: killed him, slew him outright.'

'Impossible!' exclaimed Selwyn in horror.

'It is quite possible, sir, for he did it,' answered Mr. Trosdale. 'My poor father was an Inspector, and it was nothing but the barbarity of that man Dandison which wore him out and caused his death. Dandison has the same spite against me; so he sends an ignorant lad to Liverpool, to the hardest-worked district in England. It's an insult to me, Mr. Serle, and a gross injury to you.'

'But, Mr. Trosdale,' Selwyn ventured, 'an

inexperienced Assistant must go somewhere to learn his business.'

' He needn't come here, though !' retorted Mr. Trosdale irascibly. ' We are waist deep in work all the year long. We never shall be anything but in arrear. There's Cramsey, over opposite, a low-born, ill-bred fellow (you'll know him one day)—there's that man, as mean a scoundrel as ever lived ; he can get experienced Assistants. And why ?—because he cringes, fawns, sir, upon Dandison, and everybody else who comes here.'

' Does Mr. Dandison often come down ?'

' Far too often. He's underhand ; he tries to throw you off your guard, and then appears suddenly, when he thinks he is not expected. We're always in arrears here ; but I tell him as long as I have a district so large as this, with no proper assistance, it is useless to expect me to keep my work in hand. And now he has chosen to send you —why, he might as well have sent a child in arms ! However, it's not my affair ; I wash my hands of it.'

There was a large window in the office,

which occupied nearly the whole of the side facing the partition. It possessed a deep wide sill, about breast high. As he finished his peroration Mr. Trosdale rose and leaned over the ledge, where he stood for several minutes gazing down into the street.

'Well,' observed Selwyn, 'it appears a bad business; but I must only try to learn my work as fast as possible.'

'Oh, I can't attempt to teach you,' the Surveyor rejoined. 'We have all far too much to do to teach anybody anything.'

'Then how am I to learn my work?' asked the newcomer in dismay.

'That is Dandison's affair, not mine.'

Selwyn made no answer; he had, in fact, none ready. The utter carelessness with which the Surveyor disclaimed all responsibility about his welfare abashed him. It was now clear what Mr. Trosdale meant by saying it was 'an injury' to send him to such a district. The words had puzzled him when they were spoken. An injury indeed, if he were to be left without instruction in hisduties; to pick up only such crumbs of knowledge as he could glean by means of his own wits.

He was about to venture another question, when the door of the outer office opened, and some one entered laughing boisterously, and slamming the door violently behind him.

'That is Mr. Thistlethwaite,' observed the Surveyor. 'Thistlethwaite, just come round here, will you.'

The person whom he addressed did not comply with this request till he had again opened the door and shouted a jest after the friend from whom he had parted in the passage, and who in his turn came back and entered into a conversation carried on in whispers, with much merriment and a spice of bad language.

Mr. Trosdale evinced great impatience during the course of this colloquy; he frowned, rapped loudly on the window-ledge, and once or twice called out 'Mr. Thistlethwaite!' in a deprecatory tone.

Mr. Thistlethwaite, however, finished his dialogue before he paid the smallest attention to the Surveyor's request, and when he did come round the partition was still laughing at his friend's last remark.

'Dandison has sent me a new Assistant,'

began Mr. Trosdale, plunging into his grievance at once. ‘This is Mr. Serle.’

Selwyn stood up and shook hands, an attention which Thistletonwaite apparently did not expect. He accepted the politeness, however, and then, turning to the Surveyor, asked anxiously :

‘What experience has Mr. Serle had?’

‘None at all.’

‘Does Dandison mean to do the work himself, then?’

The Surveyor shook his head mournfully.

‘I won’t,’ declared Thistletonwaite. ‘I’ve worked like a slave in this office in my time, and I won’t do it again for any man alive, even for you, Mr. Trosdale. If Dandison wants extra work done, he may pay for it.’

‘I don’t know what the end of all this will be, I am sure,’ said the Surveyor gloomily, and as if to emphasize his words he took down his hat from a peg behind his chair and put it on.

‘I don’t either,’ observed Thistletonwaite, and went back into the outer office, shaking his head.

There ensued an awkward silence, which Mr. Trosdale broke by saying :

‘ You had better see if you cannot find lodgings this afternoon, Mr. Serle. I should like you to be here as early as possible to-morrow—say about half-past nine. Good-day.’

‘ Shall you come back before we close ?’ asked Thistletonwaite.

‘ I think not.’

When the Surveyor had gone, Thistletonwaite observed :

‘ So you are only newly appointed.’

‘ I received my appointment yesterday.’

‘ Most unfair to you to send you here then. It’s just the kind of thing, though, Dandison is always doing.’

‘ Is the work really so hard ?’

‘ I wish to heaven I was out of it, that’s all. I shan’t stay long—I’ve had about enough of the whole thing.’





CHAPTER IV.

HER MAJESTY'S SERVANTS.

AFTER some hours spent in traversing the streets and suburbs of the town, more dreary than usual by reason of the rain which fell persistently, Selwyn secured a lodging which came within his means, transferred his luggage to it, dined on a steak swimming in grease, spent an evening not the least wretched of his life, and retired to bed to be kept awake from two o'clock until seven by the crowing of a ferocious cock, which seemed to have no greater wish on earth than to proclaim his private affairs to an unappreciative world. He rose at eight, unrefreshed and jaded; and having lodged a mild protest with his landlady regarding the conduct of her

fowls, which she informed him belonged to a neighbour, he set out to walk to his office.

The door was not open when he arrived there punctually at the time indicated by the Surveyor, and he saw no one about, whom he could ask for the key. It was ten minutes to ten when a young man appeared, bustling down the passage as much out of breath as if he had run all the way from his home, wherever it might be situated.

‘Good-morning,’ he said. ‘I suppose you are Mr. Serle, our new Assistant. My name is Holt. Trosdale hasn’t come, has he?’ he added anxiously.

‘I have not seen him,’ answered Selwyn.

‘That’s lucky! I’m hardly ever late; but I met my bootmaker this morning and had to dodge him. Isn’t the key there? Tom must have got it. Look here, I’ll show you where you can always find it.’

And he hurried off up the passage, followed by Selwyn. Turning along the corridor which led, as the new-comer subsequently learnt, to the pay-office, he stopped at a small room, out of which came a sickening gush of hot bacon fat, oil, and tallow candles.

'Pish! what a stench,' said Holt, entering the room, nevertheless, and going to a drawer, which he opened. 'See, No. 7 is ours.' And he took out several keys, one of which he selected. Then, observing that Selwyn had not come further than the door, he remarked :

'Ay, it does smell beastly. I wonder Tom can stand it himself. Isn't it queer that old Burgess doesn't stop it? His room's just round the corner.'

'Who is Burgess?'

'Why, he's the Collector, you know, head boss of the Inland Revenue in Liverpool. You'll know all about him soon. Why there isn't a man under him in the building who doesn't hate him. Lucky for us that we're not.'

'I thought you said he was head boss over the Inland Revenue.'

'Ah! but I didn't mean the taxes. The Surveyors aren't under him.' Then, as he unlocked the door. 'It's jolly lucky Trosdale's not here yet. He isn't often so late. Why, it must be ten o'clock.'

'It is,' said Selwyn, with calm certainty.

In half a minute after he opened the office door Mr. Holt had taken his hat and coat off, opened the cupboard doors, dragged out a heap of papers, covered his desk with them, and seizing a pen, began to write with an air which defied doubt as to his having been at work for the last half-an-hour at all events.

'Now he may come as soon as he pleases,' said this conscientious person to Selwyn, who understood the 'he' referred to meant Mr. Trosdale.

It was not long before *he* did come, not apparently in the best of tempers. He cast a quick glance round the office from beneath his shaggy eyebrows as he entered, answering Selwyn's rather timid 'Good-morning' with a brusque nod.

'Thistlethwaite not here yet?' he asked sharply.

'Not yet,' said Holt, without looking up from his work.

'What time did he leave last night?'

'Not before half-past six; I was here till then.'

Now Mr. Trosdale knew better than this,

having passed beneath his office windows at a quarter to six, and seen no light in them. He frowned, but said nothing ; then he turned to Selwyn, who stood beside the fire, which seemed grateful in such wretched weatxer.

' I am going to an appeal meeting to-day, Mr. Serle, so Thistlethwaite must show you what to do when he comes. I shall be obliged if you will get through as much as you can of the work he gives you. I am sure I don't know how it happens that we are always so much in arrear. We need not be, were Thistlethwaite only regular.'

' Is he not regular ?' ventured Selwyn.

' Oh dear no ! Nobody is regular who comes here,' said the Surveyor impatiently, sitting down at his desk and keeping his over-coat and hat on while he rummaged among drawers full of papers.

' Just tie up those assessments for me, Holt, and fetch a cab,' he said presently ; and then as Holt departed with alacrity upon this errand, he asked civilly :

' Did you find lodgings to suit you, Mr. Serle ?'

' Yes, thank you,' answered Selwyn ; ' they

are not very grand, but I dare say they are as good as I am likely to get.'

'Ah! well,' the Surveyor replied indifferently, as he took up his papers, 'if they do not suit you, you can change. Where did you say they were?'

'In Queen's Road.'

'A good neighbourhood. I shall see you again this afternoon, I expect. Tell Thistlethwaite, when he comes, that I shall be back, and ask him not to go till he sees me.'

. And with this parting injunction, Mr. Trosdale shouldered his bundle of assessments and marched off to his cab. Holt, however, did not appear again for so long that Selwyn thought Mr. Trosdale must have taken him with him. Ten minutes passed, a quarter of an hour, half an hour, eleven o'clock struck, yet no sign of either Thistlethwaite or Holt. Selwyn began to feel uneasy at being alone in the office, and wondered what he should do if a wrathful taxpayer suddenly appeared and wanted to know something, of which he, Mr. Serle, had no knowledge.

At twenty minutes past eleven the door

flew open violently and Thistlethwaite entered, looking seedier, if possible, than on the previous day. His brown coat was flying open, and revealed a wide expanse of soiled red necktie with no pin in it. His hat was thrust back on his head, and his eyes were heavy and bloodshot, as if he had not been in bed.

'Hello, Mr. Serle?' he said, laughing, 'are you left in charge? This is a pretty go. Why, where's Holt?'

'I don't know,' answered Selwyn. 'He went out about half-past ten to fetch a cab for Mr. Trosdale, and he has not come back.'

'In the Slippers, I'll be bound,' said Thistlethwaite meditatively.

'Is that a branch of the Custom House?'

'Yes,' the other answered with a grin. 'I'll just go and see whether he's there.'

'I say—hold on!' cried Selwyn. 'What am I to do——?'

But it was too late; the door had slammed, and Thistlethwaite was gone. There was no help for it. He was the only person left available to answer inquiries. He retreated behind the partition, in order that he might

be out of sight in case anyone did come, and so gain a moment's time for consideration.

Behind the partition there was no other occupation than the window, unless he examined the papers left scattered over Mr. Trosdale's desk, which he did not feel inclined to do. The window looked out upon a wide open space—a quadrangle wanting one side—formed by the projecting wings of the Custom House, in the main body of which the Surveyor's offices were situated. Across this space a public footway ran, passing under an archway in the centre of the building and emerging in Castle Street. The footpath occupied, however, a very small portion of the space, the remainder being sometimes used for storing Corporation rubbish, blocks of timber, rusty anchors, piles of stones, and such accumulations of odds and ends as Corporations (and private individuals) keep, out of some superstitious idea that they may one day prove of use.

It is no uncommon thing for an itinerant juggler to deposit his properties upon this space, which proves, in fact, a very lucrative ground for displays of such a nature, owing

to its propinquity to the idle crowd which is always thronging round the Sailors' Home. There may often also be seen a thin, melancholy man eating burning tow, and reproducing yards of pink paper done up into an artful spiral from his mouth. Sometimes it is a negro who takes up his stand, tossing swede-turnips into the air, and splitting them on his forehead as they fall; sometimes a strong man rolling cannon balls up his arms, and round his shoulders and the back of his neck; sometimes a wandering medicine man with two bottles, which he endeavours to persuade you represent the contents of a human stomach, before and after swallowing his drugs. But whoever may come, juggler or man of science, preacher or fighting bully, he never fails of attracting a crowd of admirers, followed by a plentiful harvest of pence.

On that forenoon Selwyn was not favoured with any of these more exciting sights; but he was privileged to witness a very interesting hunt, in which the quarry was a small child with a preposterously dirty pinafore, and the hunter a strapping woman, who pursued

the child with the avowed intention of thrashing it within an inch of its life.

Selwyn was becoming absorbed in watching the chase when he heard the office door open, and someone enter. No one spoke, but the noise which the door made was followed by a strange shuffling sound, as if the visitor were kicking the wall with all his might. Selwyn looked cautiously round the corner of the partition and beheld a tall young man kicking his right foot against a pillar, which was half in Mr. Trosdale's outer office and half in the Long Room of the Custom House. The man threw his foot up so high that it was a marvel how he managed to maintain his balance, and even then he was not satisfied, for he struggled violently to touch a still loftier point on the pillar. After spending about a minute in this exercise, during which time he had taken not the smallest notice of Selwyn, he drew a stumpy pencil out of his pocket, made a mark upon the column, and went out without a word, The door had hardly closed upon him, however, when he came back, and hitching his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat,

demanded with great emphasis and in a strong Irish accent :

‘ Well, young man, and how's the bloddy tax ? ’

Selwyn, though somewhat taken aback, answered with considerable presence of mind :

‘ Really, I should think you must know more about it than I.’

‘ Why, now ? ’ asked his visitor, scrutinizing Selwyn sharply, with his head thrown a trifle back.

‘ Because I am a stranger to the place and the work ; and I suppose, from the exercise in which I have just seen you engaged, that you are not.’

‘ You're right, young man. Devil a stranger I am here,’ replied the other. ‘ My name's Kerry, and I'm the Assistant in Second Liverpool over opposite. You're Trosdale's new calf, I'm thinking ? ’ And having uttered these words, Mr. Kerry seated himself upon the counter and began whistling ‘ The Yellow Blanket.’

As he did not seem to expect any answer Selwyn did not return one, but devoted himself to examining a person he regarded as

the latest lunatic in a building tenanted by maniacs. Mr. Kerry was tall and lean, almost (if the expression may be permitted) rawboned. He seemed to belong to that particular class of North of Ireland natives who are never tired of boasting of their Scotch origin. That Mr. Kerry had some right to claim Scotch blood was evident from his high cheekbones, sandy hair, and light blue eyes, which had a trick of contracting themselves till they looked incredibly mean. In fact, this poverty of appearance was shared by all his features, which were pinched where they ought to have been full and round, and gave an irresistible impression that the material of which he was made ran short, and had to be drawn out. The sleeves of his coat were too short for him, while those of his vest, which Mr. Kerry, for purposes of economy and comfort, had rolled up, though not out of sight, were as much too long. Such was the Assistant-Surveyor of the second Liverpool district, as he met our hero's astonished gaze, sitting on the counter with his hands in the armholes of his waist-coat, whistling one of his national melodies.

'Where are you going for dinner, young man?' Mr. Kerry at length asked affably, resuming his whistling without waiting for Selwyn's answer.

'I'm sure I do not know. Is it not rather soon to be thinking of dinner yet?'

'Ah!' said Mr. Kerry, in a tone which showed more capacity for tender longing than Selwyn could have imagined he possessed. 'There isn't much else to think about here. I tell you what, we'll go upstairs together, you and me. At ten minutes to one, mind you!' and he shook his forefinger at Selwyn. 'Not a minute later, or devil a dinner you'll get up there for those hungry thieves out of the Long Room.'

Having so spoken, Mr. Kerry descended from the counter, and after one refreshing kick on the pillar, opened the door. He had not space, however, to pass out, for at that moment Thistlethwaite appeared in the doorway, followed by Holt, wiping his mouth as he came in. They elbowed past Kerry, who stood regarding them with an air of serious gravity, holding the door open in his hand.

'Is it at the Slippers you've been, the pair of you?' he asked severely. 'You'll get the sack, Holt, as sure's my name's Daniel Kerry. Trosdale 'll find you out, and drop on you like a peregrine drops on a gull. And well ye'll deserve it. Did you ever see a peregrine now, Holt?'

'Ah, shut up!' exclaimed Holt, reciprocating these evil forebodings with an assessment, which struck the wall just beside Mr. Kerry's head, of which attention that gentleman took not the smallest notice, but remarked to Selwyn :

'It's at ten to one we're goin' upstairs, young man. I'll show you the way, for it's soft and green you are this day—green as a gosling,' and sauntered out, leaving the door open behind him, after the habit of his country.

'He's right enough about you, Holt,' said Thistletonwaite, in the tone of one having authority.

Holt made no answer, but looked glum and angry as he drew his papers towards him and began to write.

'I suppose you know who that is, Mr. Serle?' said Thistletonwaite.

‘Yes, he told me. He seems a very queer fellow.’

‘You should see him come in and kick the pillar!’

‘He was kicking it this morning.’

‘No! was he?’ Thistlethwaite exclaimed; then looking at the column he added, ‘ay, sure enough, here’s his scrawl, with the date too, “D. K., —, 1879.” Blast him, I won’t have his Egyptian inscriptions here! Let him go and kick in his own office, or else rig up a pillar for himself.’ So saying Mr. Thistlethwaite took out a pencil and scored through the ‘Egyptian inscription’ in every direction, till it was illegible. ‘Trosdale didn’t take you round to the other offices this morning, did he?’ he inquired.

‘No, I suppose he had not time. He went off so early.’

‘Ah! perhaps he will do it this afternoon. Did he say whether he was coming back?’

Selwyn repeated the message he had been charged with.

‘Oh, well! you may as well get on with these returns to-day. I’ll show you how to do them.’

For the next hour silence reigned in the office ; Selwyn laid himself closely to the work which had been given him, and found with surprise how mechanical it was. It consisted merely of copying names from a list into blank spaces on printed forms, folding the forms up and addressing them. In this enticing occupation time passed quickly, till precisely at ten minutes to one Mr. Kerry put his head into the office and remarked laconically :

‘ I’m ready for you.’

The dining-room upstairs was a large room, along one side of which, for the greater convenience of carving, ran a counter. There was already a good attendance, which would, as Mr. Kerry explained, be largely increased at one o’clock, when the clerks from the Long Room were set free to dine.

‘ And it’s a good thing for us,’ he observed, ‘ that we’re here before those ravenous devils. Susan ! you’ll bring me my potato pie, and another of the same for this friend of mine.’

The damsel whom he addressed bridled and tossed back her untidy head, as she

placed knives and forks before them on the grimy tablecloth.

'There isn't any potato pies to-day,' she said.

'You lie!' said Kerry, forgetful of his chivalry; 'there's twenty at the least. I saw them as I came in. You're keeping them for them murderin' scoundrels of assassins out of the Long Room. Now I'll make a complaint against you unless you bring those two pies here at once.'

He shook his finger, and the girl brought the pies unwillingly. Mr. Kerry did not vouchsafe any further remarks till the delicacy was quite half done, when he said with awful impressiveness :

'Don't let yourself be put upon, young man, and nobody 'll put upon you.'

When nothing remained of the pie except a fragment of half-baked crust Mr. Kerry crossed his knife and fork on his plate and addressed himself to Selwyn :

'Have you seen any of the Surveyors except your own governor?' he asked.

'No, I suppose Mr. Trosdale went away too early to take me round.'

'Ay, and he'll come back too late, and to-morrow it'll be too early and too late again. Listen to a bit of advice: if you're waiting for Trosdale to scratch your back for you, you'd better do it yourself. There, look! there's the villains of the Long Room. We'll get out of this; they sicken me, they do: to prevent which catastrophe they went downstairs. In the passage Kerry said: 'You haven't seen my man, old Davey, Fourth Liverpool, yet. Come along in with me' And they entered the office opposite Mr. Trosdale's, on the door of which appeared 'Mr. D. Cramsey.' The room was arranged in precisely the same manner as Mr. Trosdale's. Passing round the partition, Kerry, according to his invariable custom, hitched his hands up into the armholes of his waist-coat, and in the same oily voice which Selwyn had previously remarked, asked suavely: 'Well, Mr. Cramsey, and how's the bloddy tax?'

The person addressed looked up for an instant, then saying gruffly: 'I want none of your obscenity here,' subsided again into his work.

Mr. Cramsey as he sat at his desk appeared

to be a person of short stature but of ponderous girth. He was partially bald, or, as Mr. Kerry more delicately phrased the matter, ‘his head was growing up through his hair.’ But if his head was rather destitute of its proper covering, his face did much to make up the average; for it shone forth from a waste of close-cropped beard and whiskers like a beacon-fire blazing on a dark moor. He was not only largely made, but so obese that his neck lay in a thick fold over his collar, effectually hiding it—a great economy in washing. The profits of the laundress were, indeed, a source of great vexation to ‘old Davy,’ who endeavoured by every means in his power to diminish them by substituting his own labour for hers.

‘This young man’s the new Assistant they’ve sent down to Trosdale,’ Mr. Kerry remarked, leaning back against the wall.

‘Eh?’ snorted Mr. Cramsey, without looking up. ‘Glad to see you!’ he added, in the tone in which he might have said, ‘It is a fine morning,’ to the conductor of his particular ‘bus; or ‘It is a wet day,’ to a porter at Tithebarn Street Station.

As for Selwyn, he no sooner set eyes on Mr. Cramsey than he recognised the stout man whom he had encountered in the passage the previous day, and remembering the terms on which they parted, he would have given much to steal away. This he might readily have done, for Mr. Cramsey's manners were not of the purest cast ; and after his gruff answer to Mr. Kerry he resumed his work without noticing by whom his assistant was accompanied. Mentally, Selwyn thanked Providence for this, and twitched Mr. Kerry by the sleeve, making signs to him to leave the room. But Mr. Kerry did not understand.

'This young man's the new Assistant they've sent down to Trosdale,' he repeated, still leaning gracefully against the wall. 'He'll have a fine easy time of it, I'm thinking. What are you pulling my coat for, you snipe ? Stand quiet, can't you ! The Surveyor's very glad to see you, though he doesn't say so ; there's no call to be thinking about going when we've only just come. What's wrong with you, Mr. Cramsey ?—sure, you're not well !'

Which last remark was elicited by the Surveyor's behaviour. Mr. Cramsey had grown suddenly purple, and his cheeks were puffed out to twice their natural size. He grasped his desk with both hands and half rose, at the same time saying in a loud voice :

' You had better take care, Daniel Kerry, how you have any dealings with Mr. Trosdale's new Assistant,' uttering the last three words with a marked emphasis, as if there were some cutting hidden satire in them. ' Like master like man, you know ; and it's my belief they are mighty well matched.'

' It's a bitter spite you have against Trosdale, I know,' observed Mr. Kerry meditatively ; ' but why you should have one against this decent young man beats me entirely.'

' Never you mind,' rejoined Mr. Cramsey, sitting down to his work again ; ' take the young man away, and tell him not to come here again.'

' I was unfortunate enough to cause Mr. Cramsey some annoyance yesterday,' said Selwyn, thinking it time to assert his right to a share in the conversation, ' and I fear he has not forgiven me yet.'

Of this remark Mr. Cramsey took no notice, except by a loud snorting noise, which he made by drawing a deep breath and expelling it sharply from between his pursed up lips.

'If you have once offended him he never will, worse luck,' replied Mr. Kerry, looking from one to the other with a face of grave concern. 'Come along out of this; we'll get no good here. Old Davy's in the blues to-day.'

'What was it you done on Cramsey?' he asked, as soon as they were in the passage. When Selwyn told him, he gloomily remarked, with a wise shake of his head, 'It's a bad job —it's a very bad job.'





CHAPTER V.

MR. KERRY AT HOME.

MR. KERRY'S prophecy regarding Trodsdale's return proved as valuable a forecast of the truth as prophecies usually do when made without previous knowledge. The Surveyor did return ; he came back depressed and very irritable, and he made no proposal to introduce Selwyn to any of his colleagues. He signed hastily the papers which Thistlethwaite laid before him, sitting, as he did so, with his hat and overcoat on, as seemed his custom, and then went away, nodding to Selwyn, and observing to Thistlethwaite that he should not be back.

The door had barely closed behind him when Selwyn, sitting in the inner office,

heard a loud guffaw from Holt, following some cynical remark made in a sneering voice by Thistletonwaite, which seemed to have reference to the Surveyor, for Holt answered :

‘ Ay, *he* doesn’t care ; but, hang it, he’s not a bad fellow at bottom.’

‘ Bottom or top,’ Thistletonwaite answered angrily, ‘ I don’t care. I only know this, that I’m not going to slave myself into an ague for him, while he goes away like this. I did it once, but by —— I’ll not do it again.’

‘ But it’s all right enough for you,’ Holt said enviously.

‘ Right ! It’s all wrong. But I shan’t be here long.’

After which Selwyn heard him rise from his chair.

‘ Aren’t you coming back ?’ said Holt.
‘ Am I to shut up ?’

‘ You may do what the devil you please,’ was the obliging answer, as Thistletonwaite slammed the door after him.

‘ Here, stop a bit !’ cried Holt, following him quickly.

Selwyn concluded that he had only gone after Thistlethwaite to ask him some question, and expected every minute to hear him come back. Half an hour, however, sped by, and another followed it, and there was no sign of either of the clerks. Perfect stillness reigned throughout the building ; the afternoon wore away. It was nearly six o'clock, and Selwyn was still alone. A feeling of desolation crept over him : he rose and looked out from the window, across the open space. The street beyond was filled with men hurrying homewards ; and as he watched he heard the hour strike. The strokes were followed by the clanging of a bell, and that by a loud hum and the tramping of many feet, as the dock labourers poured forth from the sheds, released from work. Everyone of them, Selwyn thought, had some friend to talk with, some diversion or occupation for the evening, someone who would watch for his return ; and yet he—so differently born, so differently bred—was quite alone.

He felt very desolate, this newly-appointed Civil Servant. It was indeed a strange reception he had met with.

He had formed no large expectations. He had known that on taking up his appointment his life would be for the first time in his own hands, to make or to mar. He did not seek for any other person to share his responsibility ; but he could not help feeling rather bitterly that Mr. Trosdale was acting most coldly towards him. Some show of interest in the welfare of a young man thrown on his hands would have been kind and graceful. How easy, he reflected, it would have been for the Surveyor to tell him where to find lodgings, to show him some attention which would take the chill off the first plunge into a great town—Liverpool was not then a city—full of strangers. He was not bound to do anything of the kind, of course ; it was not really any concern of Mr. Trosdale's whether his Assistant fell among thieves for want of the guidance of an older man. The Surveyor had no responsibility in the matter ; and yet—and yet how kind it would have been, Selwyn felt, if he had accepted some !

The new Assistant was ruminating in this strain when the outer door opened. Thinking it was one of the clerks returned, Selwyn did

not move ; but it was neither Holt's voice nor Thistlethwaite's that remarked contemptuously :

' They're silly devils here ! Sure, they've gone away and left all their assessments open ! '

Selwyn's heart warmed even towards Mr. Kerry at this moment, and he went round the partition softly.

' Hollo, Kerry ! ' said he.

Mr. Kerry started back suddenly.

' Holy St. Bridget ! ' he exclaimed. ' And who may you be ? '

' Who should I be, but myself ? ' answered Selwyn. ' I'm neither a ghost nor a thief ; but only a discontented Assistant-Surveyor.'

' Sure, it's that young snipe of a Serle ! ' cried Mr. Kerry, relieved. ' How you frightened me ! Are you discontented already ?—though that's not much wonder. What are you doing, sitting here after hours, man ? And where's the other fellows ? '

' Such a lot of questions ! ' Serle replied merrily, cheered by the Irishman's friendly voice. ' And not one among them that I can answer. I don't know where the other fellows are ; gone home, I suppose.'

'And why don't you go too?'

'I scarcely know. I waited some time to see if anyone would come back; and then I fell to thinking.'

'That's a foolish thing to do,' observed Mr. Kerry drily. He had seated himself as usual on the counter, and now began to whistle 'Garryowen.'

Selwyn kept silence, not being prepared to argue the point.

'It's lonesome here!' observed Mr. Kerry gravely, after a short interval.

Selwyn burst out laughing. The tone in which Mr. Kerry made this profound remark struck him as comical.

'How did you discover that?' he asked.

Mr. Kerry made no direct answer, but springing clumsily off the counter, seized hold of the papers which were lying scattered about the office.

'Here, young man, lend a hand,' he said, 'we'll put these things away anyhow, and then Holt 'll have to sort them out to-morrow. Serve him right, the lazy hound!'

He shovelled everything haphazard into the cupboard as he spoke. The keys were

hanging in the door, and as Mr. Kerry turned them with a snap, he observed :

‘ Put these in your pocket, and take my advice. You just come down late to-morrow morning, so as Thistlethwaite and Holt can’t get a blessed thing before Trosdale comes ; and then you’ll see Trosdale will have them.’

This was said with such evident enjoyment in anticipating the scene that Selwyn laughed again.

‘ Now then,’ said Mr. Kerry, when they had emerged into the gloomy passage and were groping their way out of the building ; ‘ will you come to tea with me, or will I go to tea with you ?’

‘ Well, my rooms are in such a mess,’ said Selwyn, taken quite aback. ‘ I haven’t had time to arrange anything. So, if you don’t mind, I would rather have tea with you to-night.’

‘ Sure, I’ll be very glad,’ Mr. Kerry said, feeling perhaps a trifle disappointed, for he loved change of any kind. ‘ It’s not far,’ he added. ‘ You’ll not know what street this is, maybe——’

Selwyn shook his head.

'It's Juke Street,' explained Mr. Kerry, meaning Duke Street, 'and there isn't any man alive knows how old it is.'

This was probably an overstatement of the truth; for the origin of any street can hardly be lost in obscurity. But, indeed, the houses were very old, and belonged to an age when buildings were more spacious and substantial than they are now, and the decorations placed in them were a labour performed for love far more than for money. They had fallen sadly in the social scale, however; some were turned into taverns, and many more were sailors' lodging-houses. The doors of most of them stood open, and Selwyn could see, in passing, broad staircases rising out of spacious halls wainscoted with dark oak which time had stained with the richest colouring.

Mr. Kerry lodged in what had once been a mansion at the upper end of this street, near the point where the ground rises in a steep hill towards the better part of the town. It presented a dilapidated appearance from without, and looked as if it had sustained a siege. Four steps led up to the door, but

they were worn into such deep hollows that it was not easy to discover where to put a foot with safety. The railings, too, had lost their supports, and hung so loosely that they were a snare instead of an assistance to Mr. Kerry's visitor. Pitfalls seemed to have been wilfully made, just as Jack the Giant Killer sawed the drawbridge half through, in order that the giant might tumble into his own moat.

Selwyn refrained, however, from expressing any such idea, and followed silently into the house.

Mr. Kerry's sitting-room was illuminated by a most glorious fire, piled lavishly up in a huge grate, and imparting such a sense of warmth to the Assistant-Surveyors coming in from the damp evening air that they both expanded into smiles at the same instant.

'This *is* comfortable,' said Selwyn, going over to the fire and spreading his hands before it.

'Sit down,' said his host, taking him by the shoulders and placing him in a large, deep chair, which stood beside the hearth, looking towards the window.

He himself took a smaller chair opposite to Selwyn, and pulled the bell.

'We'll have eggs and ham,' he said, gloating over the words. 'Are you hungry?'

'I don't think I am.'

'That's a pity,' said his host; 'but I've got a devil of a twist, so we'll do pretty well between us. Faith! I believe they've gone to sleep downstairs.'

He pulled the bell again as he spoke, and as its loud jangle died away a voice was heard proceeding from some distant upper region. It cried: 'Alice, Alice!' then paused, and then again, 'Alice, Alice, Alice!'

'Listen till her,' said Mr. Kerry peevishly. 'Why can't she come down?'

'Alice, Alice!' the voice screamed, and with a pettish ejaculation Mr. Kerry threw the door wide open.

'Is it me you want?' he shouted.

'Lord bless us, is that you ringing, Mr. Kerry? Alice, Alice! don't you hear me?'

'In course she doesn't,' said Mr. Kerry contemptuously; 'wouldn't she hear my bell sooner?'

'Well, go and ring it again, there's a good

soul,' exclaimed the lady ; ' Alice gets deafer every day.'

' There's none so deaf as those that won't hear,' observed Mr. Kerry, obeying his landlady's suggestion as he spoke. But before he reached the bell there was a sound of some one running up the kitchen stairs, and Alice stood before him.

' Did you ring, sir ?' she asked.

' Yes, till I've tired myself,' replied Mr. Kerry. ' I want my tea ; and there's another gentleman to tea with me wants his too, so you'll get us a dish of ham and eggs. Quick, mind you, or I'll go and get lodgings some place else.'

Mr. Kerry returned to his friend, and sat with him talking quietly for the next twenty minutes about Somerset House, and the men whom Selwyn had seen there. Then the tea came, and Mr. Kerry devoted himself with such absorption to the ham and eggs that he had not much time to speak.

Selwyn ate little, but watched his new acquaintance, marvelling somewhat at the speed with which he had fallen into intimacy with him. It seemed to him strange that he

should be sitting at that moment in the lodgings of a man whose existence he did not suspect the day before. Not a man, moreover, he reflected, who seemed to have much that was outwardly attractive: in fact, an odder personality it would have been hard to find. And his room!—as ordinary a room as could be imagined, ‘lodging-house’ and ‘maid-of-all-work’ written large all over it; rickety chairs, dusty tables, and a cheap engraving of the Trial of Strafford in Westminster Hall. No books; no music—stay, there was a French horn lying on a table in the window. Did Mr. Kerry play it, Selwyn wondered.

Having devoured the last morsel of ham, Mr. Kerry turned his chair slowly round towards the fire, and with a deep sigh of satisfaction put his feet on the fender, and stared into the blaze for some time without speaking; then he fixed his eyes on Selwyn, and asked:

‘So ye’re discontented already?’

‘A little,’ Selwyn admitted, surprised at his new friend’s memory.

‘Well, it’s mighty foolish——’

Selwyn shrugged his shoulders.

'I say it's foolish,' Mr. Kerry repeated ; 'any man who quarrels with his bread and butter is a fool.'

'There's sense in that,' Selwyn answered ; 'but I haven't quarrelled with my bread-and-butter yet—and I don't mean to quarrel with it. You must give me time : all this is new to me ; and, to tell the truth, it is not quite what I expected.'

Mr. Kerry glanced sharply at his guest, but made no answer. Perhaps in that moment some sense was borne in on his mind that Selwyn was in a way different from other Surveyors and Assistants in the Inland Revenue. He did not pursue the thought, however, or give any sign to show that he had comprehended what his guest felt.

'It is a lonely thing to come to a strange town, among people who are strangers to you,' Selwyn continued ; 'especially when you are plainly shown that you are considered an encumbrance.'

'What do you mean?' asked Mr. Kerry in a beautiful brogue. 'Trosdale's very glad you're come.'

'He hides his pleasure most successfully then. I had half-an-hour's conversation with him yesterday, when I came; and he told me plainly he considered it was an insult to him to send me to this district.'

'Blessed St. Patrick!' ejaculated Mr. Kerry, 'who is this Trosdale? Hold a candle to him, somebody, and let's see his features.'

'To-day I have exchanged just six words with him. He has told me straightforwardly that he won't teach me my business, and that I must pick it up as I can.'

'He's a proud, contrary *devil*!' observed Mr. Kerry with conviction. 'Show me his like! You can't, I tell ye! There isn't one!'

'So it is a cheerful prospect that lies before me.'

'It is that, for you'll beat the pair of them — Trosdale, and that imp of hell, Thistle-thwaite—yet; I'll give you my note-books, and you'll just come in to me as often as you like. There isn't a man among the lot knows his work like Dan Kerry. No—not Dandison, or the Head Commissioner him-

self. Here you are,' and Mr. Kerry rushed into his bedroom and came back with a large volume of Acts of Parliament. 'Here ye are, "Anno Quinto et Sexto Victoriæ." Learn that by heart, d'ye hear me? An Act for granting to her Majesty, Duties on Profits arising from Property, Professions, Trades, and Offices, until the sixth day of April, one thousand eight hundred and forty-five." See there! that'll have to be the bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh. And here, too, "Anno Decimo Sexto," an' "Decimo Septimo Victoriæ Reginæ, cap. 34." You'll have that with you, at bed and at board. Divil a bit Trosdale knows about Decimo Sexto and Septimo.'

'There's a good deal of reading in all this,' said Selwyn dubiously, as he turned over the pages of Mr. Kerry's huge volume.

'Ay, but sure's it's nearly all padding. You might write it out in six pages. You can boil it down as you go along.'

'Well, I shall have to get it up, I suppose,' said Selwyn, with a sigh.

'You will that! And when you know it,

I'll talk to you about it. Now, let's have a smoke.'

And Mr. Kerry produced a jar of the strongest York River, and filled a short black pipe.

'That Trosdale's a queer fellow,' he said; 'he's mighty queer.'

'Have you seen much of him?'

'No; nor anyone. He keeps himself shut up, and nobody goes to his house. They say he's a miser, and that he's got sacks of gold where he lives.'

'That doesn't seem likely.'

'You can never tell,' rejoined Mr. Kerry. 'There was an old fellow I knew in Cushendall, and many's the time I've helped him down to the seashore, and set him on a rock, by reason that he was nearly blind. And there he used to beg bits of dulse from the girls to keep the life in him—not that the life was much good when it was there. And his house—you never saw such a place —there wasn't as much roof on it as a cat could sit on.' Having made which statement, Mr. Kerry stopped and looked at his guest as if expecting him to say something.

'Well,' asked Selwyn, 'and had he any money?'

'He had so!' rejoined Mr. Kerry impressively. 'When he died they found a canvas bag full of pennies in his bed. And how much do ye think they counted out?'

Selwyn professed himself unable to guess.

'Ten pounds, one shilling, and fivepence,' said Mr. Kerry solemnly; 'and all in penny-pieces.'

'Did he leave it to you?'

'Not a farthing of it!' said Mr. Kerry vehemently. Selwyn had evidently touched a still open sore. 'Not a farthing! The old blackguard never made a will, and it all went to the Crown.'

'In the name of Fortune,' asked Selwyn, 'what could the Crown do with a canvas bag full of pennies?'

'The Crown would like sacks full of gold better,' replied his host; 'but whatever it did with the old chap's savings, not one penny-piece came back to old Ireland.'

Selwyn saw he was on dangerous ground, and began to seek about for some means of

changing it. But the roving wits of his host forestalled him.

'That's a pretty pipe you're smoking,' he observed.

It was an ordinary pipe enough, but a well-marked piece of wood, and a favourite companion of its owner.

'It is a pretty pipe,' said Selwyn, gazing at it affectionately. Then with a sudden impulse he handed it over to Mr. Kerry. 'Won't you keep it?' he said. 'You have been so kind to me to-night, I should like to think you had it.'

Mr. Kerry's eyes glistened.

'Indeed, I'd like well to have it,' he said. 'And it's mighty friendly of you. You're not like most of the proud English people. You might be Irish yourself.'

'I believe I have some Irish blood in my veins,' said Selwyn, laughing.

'You're not going!' exclaimed Mr. Kerry, as his guest rose.

'Yes, if you will allow me. I have hardly begun my unpacking yet.'

'Well, you'll come and see me again soon.'

'Nay,' said Selwyn; 'you owe me a visit now.'

When his visitor had gone, Mr. Kerry seated himself before the fire, and stretching his long legs across the hearthrug, gave himself up to profound meditation. At intervals he started slightly as if he meant to get up, but relinquished his intention; and sometimes his hand clenched, and waved to and fro in the air, as if its motion assisted the course of his thoughts. Over what ground Mr. Kerry's mind was travelling, or how long a journey it might have performed, is uncertain; for his ruminations were brought to an abrupt close by the discovery that the fire had gone out. He got up when he perceived this, and after casting one or two hesitating glances at the coal-box, he thrust a hand into each pocket of his jacket, and puffing furiously at his pipe, went out of his room and along a passage, which led to the back part of the house.

A descent of three steps brought him to a half-open door, whence a bright light and the flicker of a fire issued cheerfully. Mr. Kerry took the pipe from his mouth, and thrust his head into the apartment.

'Sure, you're quite alone,' said he.

'Quite alone,' was the reply, in a high-pitched woman's voice, 'and *so* solitary! Won't you come in, Mr. Kerry?' which invitation Mr. Kerry immediately accepted.

'If your conscience is easy and your digestion's good, you ought to be quite cheerful,' he observed, sitting down as he spoke in a rocking-chair, from which the lady cleared away some work materials.

'Ah! everyone has not your lightness of heart,' rejoined she; 'or your cheerful spirits, Mr. Kerry.'

'More's the pity,' replied that gentleman, rocking himself gently to and fro.

The lady sighed.

Mr. Kerry appeared to find the motion of his chair soothing, for his eyes gradually closed, and but for an occasional puff of smoke which issued from his lips it would have seemed that he was asleep. The lady sewed on steadily, the noise of her needle being almost the only sound audible. At last Mr. Kerry's eyes opened.

'Miss Dormer,' said he; 'that's a quiet, steady young man.'

'Dear me,' she answered, 'who are you speaking of?'

'Why, that young man who came to tea with me this evening.'

'I did not see him; but you always have such nice friends!'

Mr. Kerry digested this remark for some time in silence; then he said:

'Captain Bottles is gone away, isn't he?'

'Yes, he's gone at last, poor dear man. His brother, the minister, came and took him off in a cab, and they will send for his boxes to-morrow. I'm afraid we'll miss him sadly, Mr. Kerry.'

'We'll know he isn't here, if that's what you mean,' Mr. Kerry answered. '*I'm* not sorry he's gone. Was he drunk when he went?'

'That's what the minister asked; but I don't know. Perhaps he wasn't quite sober: but then sailors are not like other men.'

'Deed, and they're not,' Mr. Kerry assented. 'The brother, what's he minister of, or is he a minister at all?'

'I don't know. He wore a white tie.'

'That's nothing to go by.'

‘Well, perhaps he wasn’t a minister. But the poor Captain’s gone, anyway.’

‘Then the room is empty?’

‘Yes, for the first time these two years.’

‘You seem pleased?’

‘Well, not exactly pleased,’ replied Miss Dormer apologetically, ‘because the Captain made the house cheerful. But there’s the extra space now he’s gone, and the house is none too big.’

‘Holy St. Bridget!’ exclaimed Mr. Kerry. ‘What’ll ye do with it all? There’s this room and the kitchens, and your own room, and the little room on the stairs, and Captain Bottles’ two rooms, to say nothing of my rooms and the attics. Anybody might lose themselves wanderin’ through the house. You’d better let them.’

‘After all, that only makes seven rooms besides the kitchens and attics; and then, you know, one might require more space any day, and not be able to turn out a tenant just because one wanted his rooms.’

‘I don’t know why. You’re not going to be married, are you?’

This suggestion Mr. Kerry threw out as a

kind of *reductio ad absurdum*; but Miss Dormer took it seriously. She bridled and simpered, as she answered :

‘Not just now, perhaps; but I might.’

‘So might the man in the moon, or so might I.’

‘So you might,’ rejoined the lady, and if the fire had not flickered so brightly as to make the point doubtful, it would have seemed that Miss Dormer blushed. Mr. Kerry glanced at her, and became suddenly thoughtful.

‘Well, it’s your own, to do as you like with,’ he observed; ‘but, if you’ll accept my advice, you’ll get that young man to take Bottles’ rooms.’

With these words, Mr. Kerry knocked the ashes out of his pipe into the fender, and handed it to Miss Dormer, who, apparently well accustomed to this proceeding, took it from him, and filled it from a canister which she reached down from the chimney-piece. She gave it back to Mr. Kerry together with a lighted match, and sat meditatively pressing the point of her needle on her lower lip.

' You see,' she observed, ' I am not very anxious to let the rooms again.'

' So it seems. But you won't get such a chance another time.'

' Do you really think he would be a quiet lodger? Would he be reeling home tipsy, now?'

' Pooh!' said Mr. Kerry contemptuously; ' his head isn't strong enough.'

' And would he come? You don't know that yet?'

' He'd come,' said Mr. Kerry, with poetic fervour, ' like a linnet to its nest.'

At this pretty speech, out of which, with very little trouble, she could extract a gratifying compliment to herself, Miss Dormer simpered. What answer she might have made, or whether she would have hauled down her colours and consented to receive Selwyn, can never now be known; for at that instant there came a furious ring at the bell, and a thumping at the front door, as if mad bulls were charging it.

' My gracious!' exclaimed Miss Dormer, starting violently—she was of a nervous disposition. While Alice, the servant, ran up

the kitchen stairs, Miss Dormer stole into the hall, so as to see who entered. But the door was no sooner opened, than she fell back with a sort of shriek, clasping her hands together; at the same time a heavy, lurching footstep sounded in the passage, and a burly sailor appeared in the house, heralded by a gust of some strong spirituous smell.

He was in a pitiable plight. He had evidently taken part in a scuffle, for his coat was rent in twain, and his hat battered in. His clothing generally was covered with mud; but he appeared sublimely unconscious of these defects, as well as of the necessity for announcing himself in any way. With all the air of a man who was quite at home, he threw out one arm, laid the other across his chest, and sang in a feeble voice, which was in odd contrast to the strength of his appearance:

“No aching head, no trembling fear,
Follows after gingerbeer.”

The gallant captain's song was full of shakes and quavers; but when he reached the end of the second line his voice failed

him. He hung his head, and with a deeply penitent appearance asked :

‘Mistress Dormer, will ye gie me ma bedroom candle?’

All this time Mr. Kerry had continued immovably smoking, though watching with a keen eye everything that passed. At this point he deemed it prudent to interpose.

‘How did he come here?’ he inquired of Miss Dormer, pointing with the stem of his pipe at the inebriated captain.

‘I’m sure I don’t know,’ replied the lady helplessly, ‘nor what to do with him now he is here.’

‘Put him out,’ suggested Mr. Kerry, springing up actively, and seizing the Captain’s arm. But that worthy resisted, grasping at everything within his reach, till the net result of the struggle was that the Captain, not being very steady on his legs, fell forward upon the floor. Miss Dormer screamed :

‘Oh, Mr. Kerry, you’ve killed him!’ she sobbed. ‘What shall I do—what shall I do?’

‘Phoo! he’s no more dead than I am. Here, get up, will you?’

Unfortunately this was the very thing which Captain Bottles appeared incapable of doing. And after trying once or twice to reinstate him on his legs, Mr. Kerry desisted from the attempt. Miss Dormer continued to sob loudly, and had no advice to offer in this crisis ; so Mr. Kerry, mastering the situation with a rapid mental survey, decided :

‘Sure, we’ll have to put him to bed.’

With that he called Alice to his help ; and the two together managed to haul the sailor upstairs, and lay him on the bed, in that room which he was fondly thought to have vacated in favour of better people.

When Mr. Kerry came downstairs he found Miss Dormer less tearful, but still greatly subdued.

‘I think I will go to bed,’ she remarked. ‘I am not so young as I was, and I can’t stand shocks.’

‘Sure, they make you younger.’ With which gallant remark Mr. Kerry bade Miss Dormer good-night, and sought his own couch, profoundly thoughtful.



CHAPTER VI.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT.

SELWYN did not follow out the scheme of revenge on the two clerks which Mr. Kerry had suggested, but went down to his office about nine on the following morning. Early as it was, he found Holt already there.

‘Have you got the keys, Mr. Serle?’ he asked anxiously, as soon as Selwyn entered.

Selwyn produced them, saying as he did so :

‘I do not think you ought to have left me as you did yesterday.’

Holt looked at him mutinously ; but finding his glance steadily returned, he answered with a slight hesitation that he had met a friend, who kept him on important business.

'It would be better if you could meet your friends at more convenient hours,' returned Selwyn gravely, and went to his desk.

The Surveyor arrived a few minutes later. He was in better spirits, and greeted his Assistant cheerfully.

'Well, Mr. Serle,' he said, 'how did you get on yesterday?'

'I filled up a good many of the forms,' Selwyn answered; 'but I have not at all a clear idea what I am doing.'

'Ah! You'll pick that up,' the Surveyor answered. 'Nothing like doing a thing if you really want to understand it. We should never get through our work if we stopped to think "about the how and the why."'

Selwyn made no rejoinder to this enigmatical observation.

'Have you been into any of the other offices?' the Surveyor asked.

'Kerry took me in to see Mr. Cramsey.'

'Well, what do you think of him?'

'Perhaps that is not so important as what he thinks of me; and I may as well tell you that my first meeting with him was rather unfortunate.'

And he explained to the Surveyor how he had found Mr. Cramsey washing his garments.

'He will never forgive you,' Mr. Trosdale said, showing in this case at least his opinion was in harmony with Mr. Kerry. 'Cramsey is the most vindictive man I know. I'm glad you saw him doing that. If it was worth while I could tell you lots of things about him. But you had better be careful. Cramsey would think nothing of doing you an injury with Dandison. He is not safe; he is dangerous.'

Then he burst into a pleased laugh.

'It was a funny thing, though,' he said. 'I like what you told him about the laundry. Here, Mr. Thistletonwaite,' for that gentleman had just entered, 'do you hear this? Mr. Serle found Cramsey at his wash-tub! A rare joke. I must go and tell Rowcroft the story.'

'I wouldn't, sir, if I were you,' said the senior clerk. 'Davy is a dunderheaded fool, and an almighty ass about his work, but, sooner or later, he manages to get his knife into anybody who quarrels with him. I'll

warrant Mr. Serle 'll be sorry he spoke, and with reason too, before he is six months older.'

' You hear that ?' said Mr. Trosdale, turning to his Assistant ; ' that's just what I said, you know.'

' I do not think you put it quite so strongly,' answered Selwyn ; ' but I must take my chance. I shall be ready to answer any charges he likes to make against me.'

The Surveyor shook his head, and Thistle-thwaite smiled contemptuously.

' Mr. Serle does not know much about the way things are managed in a tax-office,' he observed.

After saying this he was going into the outer office, but turned back to ask :

' By the way, sir, how late do you expect Mr. Serle to stay here ?'

Selwyn turned sharply round at this question.

' What do you mean ?' the Surveyor inquired. ' I suppose he will stay till about the usual time. You know, Mr. Serle, we haven't any fixed hours. I must ask you to stay as long as there is work for you to do.'

'Perhaps you will ask Mr. Thistlethwaite to put his meaning a little more clearly,' said Selwyn; 'it was after six o'clock when I went away last night.'

The Surveyor looked at Thistlethwaite.

'What I mean is this,' that gentleman replied, with a face of brass. 'I went out late in the afternoon for a little while with Holt, and I was kept on important business longer than I expected. Of course, I thought as Mr. Serle was here it didn't matter; but when I came back he was gone, and everything locked up, so that I could not do the work you meant me to finish.'

The audacity of this way of putting the case astounded Selwyn, and the Surveyor said fretfully :

'I wish you could manage not to go out in this way; but of course Mr. Serle ought to have waited. I must ask you to remember that in future, please, Mr. Serle.'

Then, as if he wished to get rid of the subject, he handed a mass of papers to his clerk.

'Just go in and see if you can settle this with Mr. Gough,' he said.

Thistlethwaite went off with a triumphant smile on his face.

'So,' reflected Selwyn, 'he means to make mischief between me and my chief. I shan't stand that. Wait a bit, Mr. Thistlethwaite.'

He settled to his work without taking any notice of the matter, and the day passed quietly. Thistlethwaite seemed to feel that, having asserted his position and scored a victory, he could afford to be gracious towards his adversary; and accordingly, when he came back, he was wondrous civil, coming many times to explain things to him, and refraining altogether from venomous remarks. It was no part of Selwyn's purpose to keep up bitter feelings, and he met Thistlethwaite half-way.

Towards the close of the afternoon Mr. Trosdale, who had been sitting for the last hour with his hands in his pockets, and his eyes fixed on the ceiling, observed to his Assistant, without turning round :

'If you can spare a few minutes now, Mr. Serle, we might as well go in and see Rowcroft and Gough.'

If he could spare a few minutes! Why,

every nerve in Selwyn's body was quivering with eagerness for some relief from the monotonous work on which he was employed. He threw down his pen with a sigh of relief, and followed the Surveyor into the passage.

'I suppose,' observed Mr. Trosdale, pointing to the door of Mr. Cramsey's habitation, 'it's no use going in there, is it?'

'Not much, I think,' Selwyn answered; 'one rebuff from that quarter is enough for the present.'

'It is rather an unlucky beginning for you. I do really believe Cramsey pulls the wires more than anyone in this building suspects. Halloa, Rowcroft! are you going out?'

This last remark was addressed to a dapper little man, with keen, smooth-shaven face, thin features, and a quaint, bright smile in speaking, who met Mr. Trosdale and his Assistant at the door of his own office.

'I was going out,' he answered; 'indeed, I was going home. My wife in fact . . .' and here he whispered into Mr. Trosdale's ear with an apprehensive glance at Selwyn, as if he feared the young man might overhear him.

'God bless my soul!' exclaimed Mr. Trosdale in a tone of profound pity, not unmixed with contempt, such as one might use towards a man who through sheer imbecility has fallen into some scrape. 'Well, well, . . . we won't keep you. I was coming in to introduce Mr. Serle.'

Hearing this, Mr. Rowcroft wrung Selwyn's hand, and then dropped it nervously.

'I am very glad to see you, Mr. Serle,' he said, and he spoke with a curious intonation, running one word into another. 'I must have a chat with you some other day. Just now, don't you know . . . Mr. Trosdale . . . yes, he'll tell you, good-bye.'

And the little man darted off down the passage, and was through the swing doors at the head of the staircase in a twinkling.

'I'm afraid Mr. Rowcroft is anxious about something,' Selwyn observed.

'It's just his way,' Mr. Trosdale replied, 'he's always excited about something. He's just had his tenth child. I haven't any patience with the man. But there, he

means very well ! And anyway, he's not malicious like Cramsey.'

With that he led the way into Mr. Gough's office, whence there issued the sound of voices in high dispute, of which one was plainly Mr. Kerry's.

'I tell you you're quite wrong about it,' said a deep, rough voice; 'there's no exemption in such a case.'

'Wrong, am I !' shrieked Mr. Kerry at the top of his voice. 'Am I wrong ? Faith I'll let you know ! You haven't read the Act.'

'Stuff !' said the other, 'show me. There's a copy of the Acts.'

'Phoo !' answered Mr. Kerry, spluttering with wrath, 'isn't it in me head ? Quinto et Sexto Victoriæ five-and-thirtieth chapter and section eighty-three. "That whenever by any flood or tempest," mark that—what's a tempest but such a swilling as the country's had these months past?—"loss shall be sustained on the growing crops,"—all of them, look you, and what's apples but a growing crop?—"or on the stock or lands demised to a tenant at a reserved rent without fine or other

sum paid, given or contracted for in lieu of a reserved rent or any part thereof, or the said lands or any part thereof shall by such flood or tempest be rendered incapable of cultivation for any year, and it shall be proved on oath to the satisfaction of the Commissioners for General Purposes acting for the division where the said lands are situate that the owner of the said lands hath, in consideration of such loss, abated or agreed to abate'

'Merciful Providence!' exclaimed the other man, 'can't you give me the reference, instead of deafening me in this way?'

'I have given it you,' answered Mr. Kerry sulkily. 'What can you have better than the very words themselves?'

'Yes, yes, yes; but not all at once! You stun me with your gabble. Come in, come in, Trosdale; glad to see you. Here's Kerry fit to throttle me, because I hinted gently that he was wrong.'

'I heard you,' said Mr. Trosdale; 'but you didn't do it gently. You might have meant to be mild, but you certainly were not.'

'Hear him!' said Mr. Kerry; 'I'm obliged

to you, Mr. Trosdale. Faith, it's a sweet temper I possess if I'm well treated.' Here he stopped and sniffed the air suspiciously. 'Somebody's cooking again!' he exclaimed. 'I don't believe there's ten minutes in the whole day without some poisonous smell coming wandering down the passage. Why don't you stop it, Mr. Gough? It's not decent or respectful to the public.'

'I wish you'd show me how to stop it. It's upstairs, I suppose. But I think you're wrong, Kerry, I don't smell anything.'

'Nor do I,' said Mr. Trosdale.

'It's poor noses you've got then, anyway,' rejoined the Irishman, and at that moment an unmistakable gush of some greasy odour was wafted into the office; 'perhaps you don't smell anything now, either of you? I wonder what they'd think of you in Ireland.'

'Good heavens!' exclaimed Mr. Gough, starting up angrily from his chair, 'this is unbearable. Is there any reason, Trosdale, why I should be poisoned in my own office all day long?'

'I don't know of any,' replied his friend; 'why do you not trace it out?'

'So I will. We'll all trace it out together. Come along, Kerry, come along . . . eh! Who . . . oh! I'm very glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Serle, and I'll be eternally your friend if you'll help me to stop this nuisance.'

'I will do my best,' said Selwyn, laughing, and with that the whole party emerged into the passage.

'It's this road it's coming,' said Mr. Kerry, walking in advance of the rest, 'and faith! I think it blows from the little room the Inspector uses when he's here!'

'How can that be?' asked Mr. Gough; 'it is always kept locked.'

'Perhaps they shut poor old Fisher in the last time he came down,' suggested Mr. Trosdale, 'and his body's moulderling away there all this time.'

'I liked Fisher well enough,' said Mr. Kerry, hesitating, 'but I'd be sorry to see him if he's dead.'

'Fiddlepin's end!' exclaimed Mr. Gough; 'can't you tell bacon when you smell it? Why, I heard it frizzle only a moment ago. Here open this door, will you! Open it, I

say directly, if you don't want me to kick the panels in.' And he began a violent assault on the door, as if he really meant to fulfil his threat. There was a slight scuffling noise in the room, but no notice was taken of the summons.

'I'm positive I heard somebody inside,' said Mr. Gough, looking round at his companions; 'didn't you, Trosdale?'

'I heard something,' replied that gentleman; 'but I think it was only Kerry doing a double-shuffle on the mat.'

'May I die if I've winked an eyelash since Mr. Gough began to knock,' was Mr. Kerry's rejoinder, and as he spoke he knelt down and applied his eye to the keyhole. 'There's some one inside, as sure as we are all wicked sinners,' he said. 'I see a thing like a girl's dress.'

'A girl's dress? Fie, Kerry, there are no such doings in these offices,' said Mr. Gough; 'you must have a bad heart, or you wouldn't think of those things. Let me come and look. Faugh! what a stench there is.'

Just as everybody was trying to look through the keyhole of the door at the same

moment, they were startled by a voice at their elbows which said :

‘ I think I can save you a little trouble, gentlemen, if you will let me help you. I have a key which fits this lock.’

It was Mr. Cramsey, who had stolen on them unperceived. It was an unpleasant surprise to all present. Mr. Trosdale turned aside and swore beneath his breath, while Mr. Kerry scrambled up from his knees, and rubbing his head, inquired angrily of his chief :

‘ What for did you jam my head against the door ?’

Mr. Cramsey deigned no answer, but producing a huge bunch of keys, carefully selected one, unlocked the door and threw it open. All the men crowded at once into the room.

There was a small fire in the grate, and beside it stood the clerk Holt, looking the very picture of misery.

‘ Why, it’s nobody but that *omadhaun* Holt !’ exclaimed Mr. Kerry in a tone of deep disappointment. ‘ Where’s the girl gone to ; can’t you answer, and not be standing staring there like a stuck pig ?’

'I don't know what you're talking about,' said the unfortunate Holt. 'Indeed, Mr. Trosdale, I'd have opened the door at once, if I'd known you were there, or Mr. Gough either. I beg your pardon, I'm sure. I had only come in to settle up these old assessments, and I thought it was Thistlethwaite kicking to vex me.'

'Gammon!' said Mr. Gough rudely; 'assessments don't make a smell like this. Just open that window, Kerry, or we shall all be poisoned. You've been cooking something. Trosdale, make him say what he has been cooking.'

'As sure as I'm alive!' cried Holt, 'I haven't touched food since breakfast. You can see for yourselves there's nothing here.'

'There's something mighty like grease on the fender,' observed Mr. Kerry.

'I know,' replied Holt nervously; 'that's tallow, Mr. Dandison spilt it last time he was here.'

'It's very fresh,' said Mr. Gough, who had been looking at it. 'Don't you think so, Cramsey?'

Mr. Cramsey, who had hitherto remained

in the doorway looking on, with his fat lips pursed up, and his little black eyes shining like those of a snake, waddled over to the fender, touched the grease spots with his finger, which he then applied to his tongue.

‘It’s bacon fat,’ he said. ‘Tell him to open that cupboard, Mr. Gough.’

‘That cupboard,’ said Holt, ‘why, it hasn’t been touched since Mr. Dandison was here. It’s always locked. It’s got his papers in it. He’d be very angry if it was touched.’

‘We can lock it up again,’ said Mr. Gough. ‘Lend me your bunch of keys, Cramsey.’

But this Mr. Cramsey, with a fat leer, declined to do, preferring to keep them in his own possession.

After some difficulty the cupboard was opened, and with a sort of whiffle of triumph Mr. Cramsey drew forth a frying-pan, and brandished it in the air.

‘I know,’ said Holt, clinging desperately to hope; ‘it’s the one Mr. Dandison uses when he comes down.’

The idea of Mr. Dandison, with his snowy linen and his carefully tended hands, finger-ing a filthy frying-pan which reeked with

grease, was too much for the gravity of the whole party. Mr. Kerry screamed and shouted with laughter, Mr. Gough made a sort of gurgling sound in the depths of his beard, Mr. Cramsey chuckled as loudly as he was able, Mr. Trosdale alone remained grave and gloomy.

'Why, you wretched liar,' he said, advancing a step towards his clerk, 'the pan's warm. It's been on the fire within ten minutes. Now, look here, I have had more trouble than enough with you. I've toiled and slaved to teach you your business, but you know no more now than when you came. Then we catch you in the act of cooking your filthy messes in a Government office, and now you try to choke me by thrusting falsehoods down my throat. I will have no more of it. You must go on Saturday. No, I won't hear anything you have to say. I'm sick of you. I'm going to have a snack, Gough ; will you come ?'

So saying, and remarking to Selwyn that he did not intend to return, the sorely-tried Surveyor departed, accompanied by Mr. Gough, and followed by Mr. Cramsey.

Mr. Kerry and Selwyn remained, while Holt stood looking blankly at them.

'What did I say yesterday?' asked Mr. Kerry gravely. 'Didn't I tell you Trosdale had had about enough of you?'

'Ah! go on,' said Holt, turning to pick up an assessment; 'it's not the first time he has given me the sack, and it'll not be the last. Trosdale knows I'm too much use to him.'

'You'll not beat that this while,' said Mr. Kerry, with an air of conviction. 'Come along, Selwyn; I've got a case I want to show you.'

And then, as they went down the passage, the sapient Irishman observed:

'I'm thinkin' that if Victoria Regina knew half of what passes here, it would put the surprise on her.'



CHAPTER VII.

A FRIENDLY CALL.

AT the time Selwyn received his appointment there were, and forsooth the present writer knows, may be still, in Liverpool, four Surveyors of Taxes—four gentlemen who bore on their eight shoulders the whole responsibility of the Assessment of Income Tax for that great town.

The wisdom of the Commons of England in Parliament assembled had, indeed, decreed that such responsibility should rest with a number of local Commissioners, chosen from amongst the richer inhabitants; but, inasmuch as those gentleman performed no functions which they could avoid, and as the Board of Inland Revenue made the Surveyors

feel the weight of their displeasure when anything went wrong, it is not unfair to say that the burden of the taxing of the second most important port in Great Britain was shared amongst First, Second, Third, and Fourth Liverpool.

The Surveyors had an Assistant apiece, and two clerks ; thus the principal resident staff consisted of sixteen souls, who were expected each working-day to assemble in offices probably the most inconvenient that the perverted ingenuity of man ever devised.

Possibly Mr. Trosdale was well within the truth when he said the heaviest district out of the four into which Liverpool is divided had been assigned to him—but what then ?

‘ If he gave his mind to it, the work would be child’s play,’ remarked Mr. Kerry. ‘ I know he is for ever in a muddle, and a man is like to be always in a muddle who cares for nothing and thinks of nothing except his pay. Who but he would keep chaps like Thistlethwaite and Holt ? Why, even old Davy would be ashamed of them. Davy is

not much to look at, but he won't have people about him that shirk their work—and quite right too. What is the use of keeping a dog and barking yourself ?'

'I never was more surprised than when I found you were Cramsey's Assistant,' said Selwyn, though he had before expressed astonishment on this point.

'And why wouldn't I be his assistant, or any man's?' asked Mr. Kerry, a little huffed; 'and if I had not wanted to be, how was I to help myself? I did not choose him out of thousands—I was sent down to him from Somerset House, the same as you were sent to Trosdale. I shall never forget him when I walked in with my letter. "I don't think much of the look of you," he said. "Never trouble your head about my looks, you'll find me a rare one to go," I answered. "We'll see," he grunted—and he has seen. There's not an office where the work is got through as it is in ours—that I say, though perhaps I ought not to say it.'

'I suppose he can get through a lot of work himself when he chooses,' hazarded Selwyn.

'It's not often he does choose,' was the reply. 'I'm the man takes the Liverpool 2 train right through, while my governor sits at ease and mends his pencils.'

'Mends what?' asked Selwyn, who thought he could not have heard aright.

'His pencils. Come in any morning about fifteen minutes after ten—old Davy keeps his time, I'll say that much in his favour—and you'll see him at work.'

'Thank you. I have already seen him engaged in another branch of labour, and I know my presence then afforded him no gratification whatever.'

'Faith, you're right. I forgot that for the minute; you had best give him as wide a berth as you can. But we were talking about the pencils. This is what he does regularly: he comes in puffing and blowing, takes off his hat, lays past his gloves, that look as if they had been up the chimney for a month, and that he never can get on, because his hands are always too hot; unlocks his drawer, and takes out a hone—on my conscience a hone, no less. Then he sharpens his knife. After that's done he ranges his pencils before him and

sets to work. He has two sizes of red, and he puts a point as fine as a needle on each of them, and the same with the blue, the green, the yellow, and the black, breathing all the time like a broken-winded horse. That is all he does in the office most days, except to read the letters and ask me a question, maybe. At twelve he goes out for his lunch, and stops away for two hours. When he comes back he spells the paper through, advertisements and all ; and, indeed, there's sometimes a heap of diversion to be got out of the advertisements. Then he often takes a spell in what you call his laundry, which is an office nobody else uses nowadays, and that is how he gets through his time. But, mind you, he sees that his people do their work. If he found Windrake or Battey at the Shippers, it would be short notice they would get.'

' Liverpool 1. seems a capable sort of gentleman.'

' What, Gough!—'deed, and he's not. He knows as much about taxes as a goose knows of its godmother ; and what is worse, he won't give in to those that do know. I have to put the Acts down his throat as if they

were pills ; he won't take them any other way ; and, indeed, he often won't take them at all. He thinks there is no man in the office wiser than himself.'

' But why does he not learn the Acts ? ' asked Selwyn, amazed at the scroll of ignorance Mr. Kerry unrolled before his eyes.

' Because he is too busy studying the odds. There is not a race he has not something on, big or little ; and if ever you hear he has to go to an appeal case that'll take him the whole day, just you turn to the *Sporting News*, and see whether it is not Aintree, or Chester, or Doncaster, or Newmarket, or some other devilment. It's in his blood—he can't help it. His grandfather went through fifty thousand pounds and then shot himself, and Gough is just such another. I have nothing to say against him though. I'd like well enough to be Assistant in Liverpool i.'

' And Mr. Rowcroft, what about him ? ' asks Selwyn. ' I have scarcely seen his face properly yet.'

' Faith, then you have had no loss. We call him Baby, because he's so like one.

What Dandison should do is get him a head nurse's place—he'd like that. He married a little woman with a lot of money, and he ought to retire and make room for somebody who really needs the salary. Trust him though, he'll never go till he can take a thumping pension with him. Ah! I only wish I was leading man in Somerset House for a while. It wouldn't be long before I did away with pensions.'

'With pensions!' repeated Selwyn, in amazement; 'then you would do away with the greatest inducement to enter the service.'

'That is just the evil. A man makes a good fight to get his appointment, and then he knows he may sit down and rest himself for life. If he is the worst screw that ever came out of a knacker's yard, there he is for Government to make what they can out of. There is no credit in being a good horse here, not a bit; you may just as well shirk your fences and stumble over your flat leaps, you may, for all the thanks you get. If I had my due, I would be near the top of the tree by this time; but one thing is certain, they can't keep me out of my Surveyorship

much longer, and then I'll show some of them how things ought to be done.'

'Shall you be a very hard taskmaster, Kerry?' asked Selwyn, with a smile.

'I will that,' answered Mr. Kerry, with a determination there was no mistaking. 'You may take your davy I'll stand no nonsense; I have seen enough of it in my time. I'll begin as I mean to go on. Every man under me shall know I'm his master, and treat me according. You may laugh, but it is truth I am telling you. I have thought the whole matter out, and I will manage my people on very different lines to any I have seen yet.'

'I know it will not be your fault if the work be not done,' remarked Selwyn soothingly.

'It won't be my fault, because the work shall be done,' retorted Mr. Kerry, indignantly rejecting the proffered sop. 'And I will be treated with respect. From the day I get a district every man in my office shall call me "sir."'

For the life of him Selwyn could not have helped smiling, not at the discipline proposed, but at the pronunciation of it favoured by Mr. Kerry. To imagine a young fellow

fresh, perhaps, from some crack college and speaking the pure English, which obtains amongst cultivated persons, told on the threshold of official life that he must address his Irish chief as ‘Surr,’ was enough to try his risibility.

Fortunately Mr. Kerry quite mistook the cause of his merriment.

‘Grin away,’ he said ; ‘only mind this : if you ever came to me as Assistant, you’d have in office hours to treat me with as much respect as if I were our Sovereign Lady herself.’

‘Indeed, I would try to do so,’ answered Selwyn, endeavouring, though not quite successfully, to recover his gravity, which Mr. Kerry’s accent, always strong when excited, had again almost upset. ‘I should not object to saying “sir” in the least. I consider it a very proper form of address, and one I might have used here, had I not been warned it would at once stamp me as an inferior.’

‘Yes, I know that’s the notion, and so there’s no distinction of rank in the offices. You’re as good as Trosdale, Holt’s as good as

you, and I dare say, if the truth was known, Tom, the porter, thinks himself better than any of us. It is not once in twenty times a porter here says "sir"—do you notice that? And now just tell me, is there any other service where such a state of things would be tolerated? The Army and Navy could not exist if the officers were no more than the privates, and there would be some fine scenes in Court if the barristers spoke to the judges as Thistlethwaite speaks to Trosdale. No; I won't have it when I come to my own; there is too much of that sort of spirit abroad now. If I had children, do you think I'd let them talk to me as I hear most of them talking to their parents? A slip of a girl was speaking to her mother the other day, and she says, "Oh no, dear! not at all." "It's something new to hear a mother 'deared' in that way," I thought; but I'll be hanged if the very same evening a lad of fifteen did not call his father "old man."'

'I cannot say I like such familiarity,' said Selwyn pensively—'I suppose young folks do not mean any harm, though their manners grate on one very often.'

'Grate! I should think they do. But whose fault is it?—why, their parents', for letting them. If I had called my dad "old man" or my mother a "dear," *I* know I would have got something to teach me better. It all comes round to this. I'll teach my clerks better, and so I tell you.'

'I shall not be amazed, then, when I see them.'

'You will be pleased, that's what you'll be. Wherever they put me, I hope you'll come and stay as long as you like, and I'll start you in the way of managing your own office right when you get one.'

Pending the period when he was to behold Surveyor Kerry reigning wisely and gloriously, Selwyn had to study the humours of a little kingdom which was as ill ruled as any kingdom can be that is not ruled at all.

One day in the Tax-Office was a close reproduction of the day which had preceded it. The same mechanical work, the same complaints from the Surveyor, the same arguments between him and Thistlethwaite, the same jokes bandied backward and forward between the latter and Holt, who remained

in the office as though Mr. Trosdale had not dismissed him, and a succession of visitors urging in every case identical reasons for disputing their assessments.

Eventually, as the new Assistant learned to know, this monotony has a soothing effect on the brain; perhaps it may even be the cause of that languor so commonly attributed to all persons in the receipt of public money; but a young man still fresh from a wholesome and active life, full of energy and keen aspirations, found it a hard thing to endure. The deadly dulness, the absence of congenial companionship, lay like a pall upon his spirits. He yearned for something new, some excitement of any sort, even if it were only the excitement of ejecting an angry taxpayer from the office; for the British taxpayer can be very irate indeed. How irate, how tiresome, how insolent, no one who has not been privileged to deal with him may ever hope to imagine.

As for Mr. Trosdale, he appeared to take very little interest in the business of his district. His Assistant heard incessant remarks about the backward state of the

work, and endless statements relative to the absolute necessity of doing something to advance it ; but still week after week went by and nothing was done, while Mr. Trosdale, who usually came late in the morning and left early in the afternoon, seemed to be under the impression that he amply discharged his duty to the Board of Inland Revenue by daily remarking to his staff that things were getting desperate.

He made no effort himself to right them ; in fact, he scarcely seemed to anticipate a time when his duties would be well kept in hand. He went about the office with the air of a man whose heart was elsewhere, and his mind with it, and looked at things passing before his eyes almost without seeing, certainly without caring for them. Towards Selwyn Mr. Trosdale's manner was equally indifferent.

The whole day often passed without any communication between the Surveyor and his Assistant, further than a curt 'Good-morning,' and an equally curt 'Good-afternoon.' At other times Mr. Trosdale was talkative, inveighing bitterly against the

anomalies of the system established by the Income Tax Acts, the crushing nature of the inquisition practised by Mr. Dandison, and the absurdity of making Surveyors responsible for the conduct of persons over whom they had not the slightest control. But whether talkative or silent he was alike impassable, and at the end of many weeks Selwyn was obliged to confess to himself that he knew him no better than on the day when he first entered the office, bearing with him Mr. Dandison's letter. Never did the Surveyor refer to his own private life, nor betray the faintest curiosity with regard to Selwyn's affairs ; while Selwyn, chilled and rebuffed, emulated his chief's reticence and set his wits to consider how he should make the best of an uncomfortable position.

Short as his experience of a tax-office had been, he saw already that his path was not likely to be strewn with roses. If what Thistlethwaite said was true, he had made one enemy already. Mr. Cramsey was, perhaps, less able to injure him than Trosdale and his clerk seemed to think ; but the whole affair was unfortunate. Still, there was a

bright side to the picture. He had found a friend in Mr. Kerry, and no doubt if that gentleman remained in his present obliging temper he could teach him all the things which Mr. Trosdale seemed careless of his knowing ; so that in the end the Surveyor's selfish attitude would not count for much. Of Thistlethwaite Selwyn thought very little. At first, while he was inexperienced, no doubt the senior clerk might give trouble. But that would right itself in a very short time when he took his proper position in the office.

There were many times, however, in those first weeks after his appointment, when he well-nigh lost sight of hope. Mr. Trosdale was as unpromising as a stone wall. He gave his Assistant no hints or instructions : he expressed no pleasure if Selwyn worked hard, or surprise if he showed any knowledge beyond what he could have picked up from the routine work which was given to him. Such an event did sometimes happen ; for under Mr. Kerry's instructions he made rapid strides in the theoretical part of his work. ‘Anno Quinto et Sexto,’ and ‘Anno

Decimo Sexto et Decimo Septimo' as Mr. Kerry persisted in calling them, bating, of his goodwill, not a jot of their titles, soon became almost as familiar to Selwyn as to his teacher ; though he certainly did not love their verbiage with the same intensity of affection. Mr. Kerry, indeed, was never happier than when rolling forth without once drawing breath some long section having reference to 'Any Annuity, Fee-farm Rent, Rent Service, Quit Rent, Feu Duty, Teind Duty, Stipends to Licensed Curates, or other Rent or Annual Payment thereupon reserved or charged.' Such expressions breathed new life into this energetic young man : they were even as a fresh wind blowing on a jaded spirit : his eyes sparkled, and his shoulders twitched — he loved every word of those lengthy enactments.

'I don't know what you see in these things that pleases you so much,' Selwyn once said. 'It is not English that they're written in, you know.'

'Man!' Mr. Kerry would reply, 'what is it then? Listen to the music of it! Have you no ears? Hark to the music it makes!'

It's beautiful. "Any Heritable Bond or Wadset"—what's that now? What's a Wadset?

'I have not the faintest notion.'

'No, nor anybody else,' Mr. Kerry rejoined gravely; 'but it's a lovely word.'

Mr. Kerry, indeed, had contracted the most amazing fondness for Selwyn's lodgings, where he turned up so frequently that his host began to wonder whether he might not have about him some talisman, or enchanted stone, which possessed the power of afflicting its owner with the fervent love of every creature who beheld him.

To do the Irishman justice, however, he was not effusive. His manner, on the contrary, sometimes savoured of contempt. He considered Selwyn very green, and was at no pains to conceal his opinion, even while he did his best to enable his protégé to imbibe some small portion of the worldly knowledge he himself had acquired so laboriously; but there were times when he seemed to abandon the effort as vain, and sat beside Selwyn's hearth in rapt and open-mouthed contemplation of the ceiling.

The silence was generally broken first by Mr. Kerry suddenly launching out into some quaint anecdote of his early days, which often induced Selwyn to believe that Thistlethwaite might not be far wrong when he said that Kerry had never put on shoes nor stockings till he entered the Inland Revenue Department.

Occasionally, though this did not happen often, Mr. Kerry would insist on taking Selwyn out for a walk after supper ; stalking through the streets like ‘a d—d ostrich with a cast in its eye !’ as was remarked by a gentleman past whom Mr. Kerry brushed somewhat carelessly.

During one of these nocturnal rambles the Irishman, who had been a long time wrapped in silent thought, stopped suddenly and pointed to a house, which was clearly visible at the moment beneath a watery moon.

‘ That’s where Trosdale lives,’ he said.

‘ That house ? Why, where are we, then ?’

‘ In St. Paul’s Square,’ answered Mr. Kerry.

'It's a dismal hole,' commented Selwyn; 'and the houses seem very poor. What on earth does he live here for?'

'Why, where would he live? What's wrong with the place? And what would just the two of them want with a house as big as the Queen's? Perhaps it's Buckingham Palace you'd have him rent?'

'Two of them!' said Selwyn reflectively, unheeding his friend's sarcasm. 'Who's the other?'

'His daughter—no less. Just a slip of a girl!'

'I did not think he had a daughter.'

'But he has, though. Come along, it's mighty cold here.'

'What is she like?' inquired Selwyn, moving on the more willingly because at that moment the moon became darkened by clouds, and Mr. Trodstone's house was so hidden from his curious gaze.

'Ah! you'd be proud to know that,' suggested Mr. Kerry, with a cunning wink.

'Yes, I should,' returned Selwyn, quite unabashed. 'Does she resemble her father?'

'Well, I wouldn't say that she does favour

him, or that she doesn't. She has a sort of look of him.'

'She is not pretty, then ?'

'Deed, and she is—just the very prettiest girl you ever clapped eyes on—or read about—or saw in a picture.'

'That is saying a great deal,' remarked the young man, smiling.

'It is not saying a bit too much. You'll not find her equal between John o' Groat's and the Land's End ; but what good will looks do a girl if a man hasn't a chance of speaking to her ?'

Selwyn was not ready with an answer to this profound question, so he asked :

'How did you chance to see her ?'

'By going to the house.'

'Oh !'

There was a world of meaning in the tone in which Selwyn brought forth this ejaculation. It did seem to him strange his chief should seek Mr. Kerry's intimacy whilst he denied all share in it to his own Assistant. Chilled and mortified as he had been by Mr. Trosdale's attitude, he felt for the moment a deeper vexation, and he hardly knew how to

continue the subject. Mr. Kerry, however, relieved him from all difficulty on this score.

'Not that he asked me!' he proceeded, in the tone of a man who has a grievance he wishes to ventilate. 'If I'd waited for that, I'd never have entered his doors. No; I thought I'd go and see him, and I went.'

'You went without being asked?' exclaimed Selwyn in astonishment.

'To be sure I did. An' why not? Anybody might have thought Trosdale 'd have been glad to see a friend coming in to smoke a friendly pipe with him—at all events, I thought so; and I went up to the door as bold as a lion. It was open, for a tall slip of a girl was just coming out.

"‘Mr. Trosdale at home?’ says I, and she says ‘Yes; pray come in,’ just as if she was expecting and still not best pleased to see me. So I went in, saying to myself, ‘Faith, you’re a sweet flower to be growing in this old dungeon of a house!’ and as soon as I got inside the door, she speaks up, and says, ‘I suppose it is from the Gas Company you’ve come?’ and I says to myself, ‘Sure, if she talks like that to the gasmen, divil a

one of them but 'd give the meter a turn backwards." But I told her that I was come to see Mr. Trosdale out of friendship, and I put in something about being repaid already, which she didn't seem to understand, for she only looked a bit stiff, and opened a door. "Father," says she, "this gentleman has been so good as to come to see you." And there was Trosdale sitting at a bare deal table, in an old coat, and a bit of tallow candle in his hand, screwin' and twistin' with a lot of wheels and a boiler before him.

"“Mr. Kerry,” says he, “is anything wrong at the office?”

““Devil a bit more than usual!” says I.

““Then pray tell me what I can do for you,” says he.

““Oh, I see you’re busy,” says I; “I’ll sit down and wait. I’ve come to pay you a friendly visit.” Then he grew mighty high all at once, and he said :

““Mr. Kerry, I never knew an Irishman yet who was slow to take a hint.”

““Ye’ll not find me behind the rest of them,” says I.

“Then, let me tell you, I do not desire to receive any friends unless I specially invite them.”

‘And he walked to the door, and so did I; and while I was thinking of something nasty to say to him, I found I had got outside of the house, so it wasn’t any use.’

There was something so rueful in Mr. Kerry’s tone as he related this incident that Selwyn could not help laughing.

‘Ay, laugh away,’ said his friend; ‘but those as has kind hearts feel it when they’re nipped by a frost like that.’





CHAPTER VIII.

THE PARLIAMENTARY RETURN.

AS has been indicated, Selwyn soon grew conversant with the routine of his duties, which at first, if not afterwards, he found monotonous enough. There were large books to be indexed, great bundles of circular letters to be sent out, asking for returns of their incomes from persons who had not already furnished such information, letters to be written from Mr. Trosdale's dictation, and more rarely an account to be checked, of such a complicated appearance that Selwyn looked forward with dismay to a time when the sole preparation of similar documents would fall to his lot.

It was not long before he discovered that Mr. Trosdale disliked the accounts quite as

much as he did, and was glad to entrust them to Thistlethwaite, who, when sober, could compile them far better than the Surveyor, and when drunk quite as well.

At first Selwyn was at a loss to account for the influence which the clerk exercised over Mr. Trosdale. Untrustworthy, untruthful (the new-comer detected him constantly in palpable falsehoods), drunken, insolent, Thistlethwaite appeared the last person suitable for a confidential position in any office. He was a man whom ordinary instinct would have prompted one to shun, so sodden a blackguard did he look. That such a person should be left in charge of the office in the Surveyor's absence, should be permitted to see persons who called even on important business, and report on the most serious cases without consulting his chief, puzzled and, in fact, somewhat shocked Selwyn. The whole management of third Liverpool revealed a lack of discipline which seemed to him extraordinary ; but this ascendancy of Thistlethwaite was the most inexplicable feature in it.

Gradually, however, it dawned upon him

that the clerk was tolerated, despite his evil qualities, simply because he had made himself indispensable. His knowledge of the practice on all points which arose was equal to that of any Surveyor. How he acquired it was a mystery ; but no one could work with Thistlethwaite for long without conceiving a kind of admiration for his talents—obscured though they were by his disreputable habits. He possessed an extraordinary genius for figures : not any account seemed to baffle him. He had no methods which he could explain by which he worked out his calculations ; to another person he appeared to be wandering through interminable mazes of figures, heaping results on results without any system. This was done with incredible rapidity, and with the most unfailing accuracy. In addition to these gifts he possessed a kind of low cunning, and delighted in a peculiar kind of dirty police work, which, conjoined with his extensive knowledge of the haunts and manners of shady people of all classes, proved most valuable in tracing out defaulting taxpayers and outwitting them. It was in this sort of occupation that he most

delighted, and his resources in it were well nigh inexhaustible.

When any difficulty arose—and difficulties arose very often—the proper method of dealing with it was decided by a consultation between Thistlethwaite and Mr. Trosdale, in which the clerk suggested and the Surveyor deferred to his views. The result did not come before Selwyn unless it contained something for him to copy or check.

Looking at the ascendancy which the head clerk had obtained in the office, and remembering his dissipated character, Selwyn often wondered whether he did not possess some secret influence over the Surveyor, which would account for the way in which his failings were overlooked. It seemed hard to believe that a man would of his own free will submit to an imperious dictation such as Selwyn saw exercised over his chief.

Thistlethwaite himself was a standing puzzle to Selwyn. From the midst of his sodden, dissolute life there broke forth sometimes flashes of a better nature; suggestions that at some time long past the low drunken

fellow who had then slipped so far down the primrose way must have lived among respectable people of some culture. There was occasionally an intonation in his voice which made Selwyn look up suddenly, as if he had heard some other person speak. Thistlethwaite was hardly more than eight-and-twenty, and he looked so much younger, that but for the traces of hard living, and the cynical smile which disfigured his countenance, it might have been a child's face and blue eyes looking out from beneath a mass of glossy light brown hair. The blue eyes had often an evil look in them in these days, and the face had grown very sodden ; but there were still traces of a time when their owner might have been a gentleman, and Selwyn thought he could occasionally follow Thistlethwaite's mind as, led by some chance circumstance, it wandered back to the years when two roads were still open before him. He was not most agreeable to his fellow-man at such times, and the other clerk was usually wise enough to avoid him. These fits of desponding ended generally in an outburst of more than usually heavy drinking.

Such an outburst occurred when Selwyn had been nearly two months in the office. It was a Friday, the day on which the collectors of income tax for the various townships under Mr. Trosdale's control came down to report to him how much they had collected during the past week, and to pay it over to the head collector of Inland Revenue. It was the day in all the week also when Mr. Trosdale most disliked Thistlethwaite to be absent.

He was greatly annoyed ; there were so many things which Thistlethwaite could have explained and rendered easy for him ; there were papers which Thistlethwaite had referred to one of the collectors for a report ; the case was most complicated, and the collector had a long verbal explanation to make. It was of no use : the case must stand over, the collector must come down again some day when Thistlethwaite was there ; he, Mr. Trosdale, knew nothing about the matter.

Another man was behindhand in his amount ; he ought to have accounted for twice as much as he brought in. The Board were pressing to have the accounts closed, the collector was insolent, and the Surveyor be-

lied him to be lying ; Thistlethwaite could have settled the business without any trouble. It was a maddening thing that his clerk had left him to deal with such a swarm of hornets. Either Thistlethwaite should attend to his business, or he must dismiss him and get another clerk.

‘Do you happen to know Thistlethwaite’s address, Mr. Serle?’ he asked, when his cogitations had brought him to this point.

‘Not exactly ; I believe he lives in West Derby, somewhere,’ answered Selwyn.

‘That’s no good!’ returned Mr. Trosdale pettishly. ‘This makes the fourth day he’s been away, and, as if we had not bother enough, here’s a Parliamentary Return which must go off to-night. I don’t understand the thing, I’m sure. Confound those fellows ! they ask for something fresh every fortnight. It’s desperate !’

The Surveyor uttered the last words savagely, as he contemplated a ‘refreshér’ which had just arrived from the Board, informing him somewhat peremptorily that all the papers requisite for the preparation of the said account had been in his hands for three

weeks, and further, that as the Treasury were pressing for the figures, it was urgently necessary that they should be forwarded by return of post.

‘ You’d better go into it with me, Mr. Serle,’ said he in a desponding voice, ‘ though I’m sure I don’t know what to do with the d—d thing. Just bring the assessments, will you? Holt will help you.’

‘ All of them?’ asked Selwyn aghast.

‘ Yes, yes, of course; what could we do with a part of them?’

Selwyn had not an idea what they were to do with either part or the whole; but with Holt’s assistance the assessments were brought and ranged beside Mr. Trosdale, a formidable pile, and Selwyn’s heart sank as he looked at it.

‘ Bring your chair over here, Mr. Serle,’ said the Surveyor, indicating a corner of the desk at which he sat; ‘ no, you’d better turn round the corner, and face the same way that I do. What parish is this? Mersea? Good God, how dusty it is! Turn to the summary at the end. Now you call the figures out to me.’ Selwyn called them out very steadily for

nearly half an hour, when the Surveyor pushed his chair back suddenly and struck the table violently with his clenched hand. ‘Gracious heavens,’ he cried, ‘why, that’s the gross assessment you’ve been giving me!’

‘Yes,’ said Selwyn abashed; ‘I thought you wanted the gross.’

‘Bless my senses!’ said the Surveyor, ‘if the matter wasn’t so desperate I could laugh at your folly.’ And he threw himself back in his seat with a heavy groan. ‘We shall never get this done,’ he said at last. ‘Why, the whole thing’s a net account; we don’t want the gross figures at all. My head isn’t clear enough for these things; but I wonder a young man like you didn’t see that at once.’

Selwyn might have retorted that as he had not been allowed to see any of the papers it was not very reasonable to expect him to understand what was required. But very wisely he held his tongue, and before the Surveyor could continue the attack, Holt came round the partition and said:

‘One of the public wants to see you.’

‘Just go, Mr. Serle, and see who it is,’

desired the Surveyor in a tone of utter exhaustion.

'It' was an old woman of the lower order, not to be too precise. She wore an incredibly dirty print dress, and a red and black striped shawl, both of which reeked with the odour of decaying fish. She had red hair, a red face, was monstrously stout, and led a little child by the hand. The exertion of mounting the stairs seemed to have fatigued her; for she had sunk down breathless on a chair just inside the door, and as she gasped and panted the child set up a mournful wailing which was inexpressibly sad.

'What can I do for you, ma'am?' asked Serle. The old woman gasped more spasmodically than before, and appeared to be trying to articulate something, of which, however, not a word was distinguishable. Selwyn waited a little while, then he tried again. 'You wish to see the Surveyor, perhaps?' he suggested.

The old woman shook her head.

'Oh, my dear man——' she gasped, but stopped at that point as if she found it impossible to conclude her sentence. The child

had ceased crying, and was staring at Selwyn with a black fore-finger thrust in its mouth. ‘ My dear man——’ the old woman gasped, ‘ oh, my poor dear soul—oh Lord ! oh Lord ! ’

And she shook her head and gasped more than ever, and rocked her body to and fro, till Selwyn really thought she would fall from her chair.

‘ What is all this about ? ’ said the Surveyor peevishly, appearing at this juncture; ‘ it’s impossible to work with such a noise going on ! Can’t you settle the case quietly, Mr. Serle ? ’

‘ I do not know what to do with the old lady,’ answered Selwyn; ‘ she doesn’t seem able to speak.’

‘ Good heavens ! ’ said his chief, ‘ and we so desperately busy. She must go away ; we can’t be disturbed in this manner. You must go away, do you hear me ? ’ he went on, speaking very slowly and distinctly ; ‘ you may come again to-morrow or the day after.’

‘ Oh, my dear man, my poor dear man ! ’ the old woman gasped ; ‘ oh my heart ! oh Lord ! oh dear, oh dear ! ’ rocking herself steadily to and fro while she uttered these disjointed remarks.

'This is fate,' said the Surveyor, looking round with the calmness of despair. 'I knew some cursed interruption would come as soon as we settled to the account. Can't you understand me?' he repeated, turning to his visitor. 'I say you must go away; we are far too busy to attend to you.'

This time the woman made no answer whatever, but continued groaning and rocking herself without intermission.

'I believe she is insane,' cried the Surveyor. 'Holt, just take her to the door of Mr. Cramsey's office and push her in. They've got time to attend to her there, and they'll never find out she doesn't live in their district.'

This was a commission quite in Holt's way, and he grinned as he led the old woman off, while Mr. Trosdale and Selwyn returned to the account. They had not worked at it for more than ten minutes when the office-door opened and shut violently, and Mr. Kerry bounced round the partition.

'Mr. Trosdale!' he began vehemently, 'here's a divil of an old woman, and sure she's either mad or drunk, or she's got an

evil spirit in her ; for there's not a word she can say but "Oh, my poor dear man ! Oh my heart ! Oh Lord ! oh dear !" ' Mr. Kerry imitated the old woman so exactly that Selwyn roared with laughter. ' What's wrong with you now ?' asked Mr. Kerry ; ' I wonder what you know about her ; because she belongs to your district, she does. And there's not one of us can make her move ; and what we can't understand is how she got into our office.'

' Dear me, Mr. Kerry,' said the head of third Liverpool, ' after all the years you've been in the service, I should have thought you capable of settling with one of the public without troubling me.'

' Of course I can,' said Mr. Kerry, rather huffed ; ' but she's your public, bad luck to her, not mine. Ain't I telling you it isn't my case at all, but yours ?'

' Well, well ; just settle it, will you, like a good fellow ? Here's this d—d Parliamentary Return, which must go off to-night, and Mr. Serle understands no more about it than a cat does about building leases.'

' How should he, sure, the poor stripling ?'

said Mr. Kerry, instantly appeased. ‘See, I’ll settle the old hag, and come back and tell you all about it.’

‘For God’s sake, don’t!’ cried the exasperated Surveyor; but Mr. Kerry did not hear him, or if he did, paid no attention.

For nearly an hour things went on very quietly, excepting for the visit of two widows, who wished to make a claim for the return of Income Tax, which they stated had been fraudulently collected, advantage having been taken of their ignorance of the law to plunder them. They were pacified and sent away without much difficulty, and there was no further interruption for so long that the Surveyor and his Assistant really made some progress. At last, however, the door opened again, and there followed the shuffling noise which Selwyn had learnt to associate with Mr. Kerry’s persevering efforts to plant his feet on a higher point on the pillar than he could possibly reach. Mingled with the noise of Mr. Kerry’s kicks were the whispered comments and subdued chuckles of Holt, to whom Mr. Kerry’s efforts always proved of great interest. The Surveyor bore

it for a few minutes without showing annoyance; then he threw down his pencil with a muttered curse. Mr. Kerry probably heard him, for he came round the partition with both thumbs stuck in the armholes of his waistcoat and a pleasant smile on his face.

'Well, Mr. Trosdale,' he said jauntily; 'how's the bloddy tax getting on? I settled that old Egyptian for you, I did.'

'What did she want?' inquired Trosdale in a surly voice.

'Ah! I don't know what she wanted. I got Tom the porter to take her downstairs and across the way, and set her on a bench in the hall in the Sailor's Home till she came to.'

The idea of the old lady sitting on a cold bench in the midst of a crowd of sailors till she came to, was too much even for Mr. Trosdale's bad temper, and he laughed heartily.

'Is that the way you deal with the public?' he asked, still laughing. 'Take care the Board don't hear of it!'

'Phoo!' said Mr. Kerry contemptuously. 'Sure, I didn't know who she was, or where she came from. What's this you're doing?'

he continued, seating himself on a corner of the desk, and taking up the sheets. ‘ Parliamentary Return? Why, you’re all wrong; that’s not the way to do it.’

‘ What’s not the way to do what?’ asked the Surveyor fretfully. ‘ Do go away, Kerry,’ he proceeded; ‘ I think I know my business.’

‘ Maybe you do and maybe you don’t,’ retorted Mr. Kerry. ‘ Anyhow, you’re putting sea walls and embankments into it. Man, don’t you know how to assess a sea wall?’

‘ Good Lord!’ cried the Surveyor; ‘ how many sea walls and embankments have I assessed before you were born?’

‘ Of course, I don’t know how many you assessed,’ replied Mr. Kerry, with unruffled equanimity; ‘ but if you did them like that, you did them all wrong. 16 and 17 Victoria, cap. 34, sec. 37—why, I’ll tell ye the very words——’ and forthwith the Irishman went off at score.

Mr. Trosdale put his hands over his ears.

‘ For heaven’s sake, Kerry, get out of this,’ he entreated, ‘ and leave me to manage my office my own way.’

‘Oh, I’m going,’ said Mr. Kerry; ‘but mind, I’ve told you; and if you get that return back from Dandison with a scraping letter, it won’t be my fault;’ and so, after a parting kick at the pillar, Mr. Cramsey’s Assistant departed.

The day had slipped by and it was past two o’clock, and still the return was not finished. The Surveyor sent Holt for some bread and cheese, which he munched while toiling through long rows of figures that seemed to possess the singular property of always adding themselves up incorrectly. At least, the additions and calculations which Mr. Trosdale made with their aid were so invariably wrong that any observer would have been forced to the conclusion that there must be something demoniacal about the figures. At last the workings were completed, that is to say, all the blank spaces on the form of account were filled up. And then began the crown of the work—the key-stone, which Selwyn’s chief called ‘fitting it,’ a term that requires some explanation.

When completed, Mr. Trosdale’s return did not ‘cross-cast.’ In other words, the

different items into which the account was divided did not add up, as of course, if correct, they should have done, to the same figures as the grand total. Whether this was due to the inaccuracy of the workings, or to some devilment, as before hinted, among the figures themselves, must be discovered by the astute reader. In any case, it is undoubted that the account would not cross-cast. Now if, say, six separate divisions will not add up to a required total, it is obvious that some one or other of the six must be either too large or too small. Which evil, in third Liverpool, was usually remedied by either deducting from, or adding something to, the defaulting item. Furthermore, since the required total is known, the exact amount which is to be added or deducted can be most easily ascertained. These are the great principles on which the art of 'fitting' an account is founded, worthy to be had in remembrance by reason both of their simplicity and their convenience. There are refinements in this art, as well as in most others. A skilful 'fitter' will not take off or add in one sum the whole amount which he

requires in order to make his account cross-cast ; but will lop and prune from many items, sticking on a little here, and taking off rather more there, lightening shadows and toning down sunshine, till the whole presents an artistic appearance. Trosdale was not, even in his younger days, capable of this high development of the art. He took off all he required in a single sum, and by one stroke of his pen made his accounts square. There was boldness in this, but it had the disadvantage of being liable to detection.

It was done, however, and the blurred and dirty workings were handed to Selwyn to copy fairly for the Board. Mr. Trosdale stretched his arms and wished them at the devil. Selwyn, on whom the worst work of the day had fallen, was trying to concentrate his tired mind on the copy which he was making, and to steady fingers which in spite of him *would* tremble, when the door opened and Thistlethwaite walked jauntily in.

‘ Dear me, Mr. Thistlethwaite, where *have* you been ?’ asked the Surveyor, with withering politeness.

‘ Oh ! some old friends of mine looked me

up,' answered the delinquent. ' Mad fellows, who insisted on my going about with them ; wouldn't take "No" for an answer. You haven't been wanting me, I hope ?'

' No ! We have had little or nothing to do to-day,' said the Surveyor. ' Only to take the collectors' money, which was all wrong, and prepare the Parliamentary Return to send to London. A mere trifle, which I and Mr. Serle have just finished. He is now copying it.'

' Let's have a look at it,' rejoined the clerk dryly. ' So ! Why, you've been putting in sea wall and embankments ! that'll never do !'

' Not do ? why not ?'

' For the sufficient reason that the Board don't want them. And what's this ? I don't understand how you got these figures ; this can't be right.'

' Pish !' exclaimed the Surveyor. ' If there's any mistake, you'd better go into it with Mr. Serle.'

' Not much use in doing that,' said Thistlethwaite, dropping his voice to a mysterious whisper. ' Mr. Serle, I think, must have cooked it.'

And Thistletonwaite enunciated this with a distinct emphasis, after the manner of a man who means more than he says. Then he went to his drawer, and produced several sheets of neat and careful workings.

‘If you’ll sign this,’ observed he with quiet triumph, ‘I think we’d better send it instead of Mr. Serle’s masterpiece.’

‘Good Lord!’ cried the Surveyor. ‘Only to think of how we’ve spent the day over that infernal account, when it was lying ready all the time !’

‘I only did my duty in preparing it,’ observed Mr. Thistletonwaite in a persuasive tone, and with the sanctified manner Selwyn had already learned to distrust. ‘If you only would believe, Mr. Trosdale, in spite of what anybody says, that, though I am not always at my post, I never leave my duties unfulfilled——’

‘There, that’s enough,’ broke in the Surveyor impatiently. ‘How was I to know by intuition you had precisely what I wanted locked up in your drawer?’

‘And how was I to know by intuition the Board would require a return I had ready a

week ago the very day when I chanced to be absent?’

‘One of the days when you chanced to be absent, I suppose you mean,’ amended Mr. Trosdale.

‘One of the days then,’ acquiesced Mr. Thistlethwaite. ‘As I do double work when I am here, I don’t profess to keep time like a chronometer.’

‘I see plainly we shall have to put this office on some different footing,’ declared Mr. Trosdale as a sort of general announcement.

‘Well, I wouldn’t begin at the bottom,’ retorted the clerk.

Of this sportive sally Mr. Trosdale took no notice whatever. He merely signed his name at the foot of the return, and saying to Selwyn ‘Will you be good enough to see this is sent off?’ took his hat, and departed, merely vouchsafing the information that the day had so knocked him up he felt he must go home.

‘And a lively sort of fellow you are to go anywhere,’ sneered Thistlethwaite to his fellow clerk. ‘After all the trouble I have saved him he has not even the decency to

say "Thank you." I'm sick to death of the whole thing. Well, I'll be off now; what's the good of staying here kicking my heels against nothing?" and ere Mr. Trosdale could have passed under the gloomy portico his clerk was banging the office-door behind him.

There ensued a pause—dead silence seemed to envelop the tax-offices as with a winding-sheet—not even the sound of Holt's pen scratching over the paper broke a stillness which might be felt; then the junior clerk said :

'I have an errand across the way, Mr. Serle, if you don't want me for a minute or so.'

'Very well,' answered Selwyn, too tired and downhearted to make any remonstrance; though he knew Holt would not put in an appearance again till the next morning.

Once again the outer door slammed, and the Assistant in third Liverpool was left quite alone.

There was an awful stillness about the place; it might have been a city of the dead for all sign or sound of human life.

The young man felt very weary and very

sad. ‘Will no change ever come to vary the monotony of this dreadful life?’ he thought, leaning his aching head on his hand. ‘Ah! no change can come here—at least, none to me.’

But he was wrong; ere very many days a light wind sprung up, bearing on its breezy wings an event which was to influence every day of his future life.





CHAPTER IX.

A THAW AT LAST.

THIS was a very bad morning in October. The wet summer had passed, only to give place to a wetter autumn.

In the open country, where there were at least green fields, the outlook was bad enough; but pent up in a town the sequence of wet days to wet nights, and wetter mornings to the previous evenings' downpour, became absolutely heartbreaking.

Even on Selwyn's cheerful mind the terrible weather, the monotonous character of his work, and a strange life amidst bricks and mortar, had begun to tell, and his step was less elastic, his eyes were less bright, his face was paler, his manner more subdued.

The change wrought in him was indefinable but certain.

Mr. Kerry noticed it, and remarked to Mr. Trosdale :

‘Something ails your griffin; he looks mighty white and dull.’

Mr. Trosdale, who never troubled himself much about the weal or woe of his fellow-men, took a casual glance at ‘the fool Mr. Dandison had thought fit to send him,’ and observed :

‘The Government malaria has evidently got hold of Serle as well as of better men. No one can be expected to keep his health and spirits in the blighting atmosphere of the Inland Revenue,’ he added bitterly, and then forgot all about the latest victim of Red-Tape-Routine and indignant taxpayers.

Meanwhile the griffin was fast falling into a melancholy state. He had never been for any long period alone as he felt himself to be in Liverpool. Plenty of good, kindly, genial, hospitable people were to be met hurrying through the streets, but they were not good or kind, or genial or hospitable, to him. There were many houses he would

have liked to be free to enter, and leave with the glow of their fires warming his desolate heart; but the doors remained shut against him.

To a young and struggling man the first fortnight in a large town is always a fearful and horrible experience, and Selwyn had now passed so many fortnights, each of which seemed quite as bad as the first, that he was fain for the mere sake of change to accept such few and strange invitations as his fellow clerks at rare intervals extended, and to invite them in return.

The stern necessity for strong drinks, however, created a bar in the way of many such merry-makings. Even gin, if large libations of that wholesome liquor be poured freely on the altar of good fellowship and conviviality, ‘tots up;’ and gin was not the spirit most affected by what Mr. Kerry called the ‘wild lot’ who reluctantly served her Majesty in her Majesty’s own rambling tax-offices in Liverpool.

Selwyn could not but observe a curious tendency among them all to partake of ‘Scotch’ or ‘Irish’ more and more up to

proof, and less and less adulterated with water. When to this was added a habit of replenishing glasses at shorter and shorter intervals, it may be guessed that a young man on a small salary, who had never been in debt, and never meant to be if he could help it, found after a few ‘receptions’ that he would need to take heed to his ways if he did not wish to find himself impecunious towards the end of each month.

So, seeming cold about accepting invitations which he did not feel justified in returning, he grew to be considered ‘a stand-off young gentleman’ by his fellow-clerks, and thus found himself ere long—save always for Mr. Kerry—lonely in a strange place, and extremely likely to remain lonely.

Not a pleasant situation anywhere, and one possibly more unpleasant in Liverpool than in London; but as there seemed no help for it, Selwyn doggedly set himself to make the best of his lot.

He went to the office early and left it late. He did what he had to do there carefully, even to the extent of writing as neatly as possible, and he was civil to applicants, and tried

his best to spare Mr. Trosdale trouble ; but he still felt he was making no progress in that gentleman's good graces. He had also still to guess at much of his daily work, for there was no one in his office to teach him anything. If it had not been for Mr. Kerry he could never have got on at all.

'Hand it over,' that gentleman would say when he found the griffin puzzling over some paper the meaning of which was stranger than Greek to him. 'Lord bless you ! the writing on the wall was not a bit clearer to my namesake, the blessed prophet, than taxes to me. Hand it over. The man wants an allowance for repairing his chancel, and you are not to let him have it, because he spent the money three years ago. "Provided also—That the deduction allowed under Schedule (A) No. 5, of the said Act of the fifth and sixth Years of Her Majesty Chapter 35, for the repairs of Collegiate Churches and Chapels and Chancels of Churches or of any College or Hall in any of the Universities by an Ecclesiastical or Collegiate Body, Rector, Vicar"—see that now !—"or other Person bound to repair the same

shall in respect of the Duties under Schedule (A) of this Act be the Amount of the Sum so expended in the Year preceding that in which the Assessment is made instead of an Average of Twenty-one Years as in the said Schedule (A) No. 5 is mentioned."

'There you are, plain as a pikestaff. Now you didn't know a word of that till I told you?'

'No, certainly; but I will remember it now. Thank you very much indeed——'

'Wait a bit, you're only on the threshold of the matter. You mind what the Act says about that wonderful Schedule A, and all the things that can and can't be done under it.'

'Yes; I think I have mastered a good deal of it.'

'Well, when you have marked, learned and inwardly digested the whole of it, recollect you are not to take a man's word when he claims an abatement—no, not if he was a Bishop, or the Pope of Rome.'

'Why not?'

'Why not is it? because they're all trying to cheat us. This tax-office is like Ishmael—every man's hand is against it, and its hand is against every man. You can look that up in

Genesis next Sunday. It'll be good exercise, and keep you out of mischief. You see, we are always trying to get all we can out of the public for the Queen, God bless her, and the public are always trying to pay us as little as they can, Lord help them ; so what you must do is to keep a bright look-out, and always believe every taxpayer is telling you a lie till you find out he is speaking the truth. That is the tack you'll go on if you want to be a successful Surveyor. Don't let anybody put the comother on you. Give any fellow that's trying to take you in a soft easy answer, to make him think you have swallowed the bait, and then come to me, and we'll have him fast for, maybe, a double assessment before he knows where he is.'

'But surely, Mr. Kerry, you are not serious? It would be a dreadful thing to go through the world thinking all men liars.'

'And what else are they ? tell me that. Didn't holy David say they were—no more, no less—and I suppose you don't mean to set yourself up as better than David. But you're green still, and soft! By the time you've been in this office a twelvemonth

you'll have cast your milk-teeth, and cut a wisdom grinder or two, or my name's not Daniel Kerry. Now I'm telling you, so you need not be surprised when you find yourself as cute as a Yankee lawyer.'

The prospect held out did not seem so enticing as Mr. Kerry seemed to consider it. Nevertheless, ere long Selwyn found there was that amount of fact in his friend's summary of the British taxpayer which underlies most unpleasant statements.

The dislike to pay anything that can by any possibility be evaded which is an integral part of British sturdy independence led to many a passage of arms between the young Assistant-Surveyor, who wanted to do his best for his Queen, and veteran householders who as earnestly desired to do the best they could for themselves. At first Selwyn had to brace up his courage for these encounters, but so hardening is the force of habit that finally he welcomed such cases as a relief to the tedium of routine work.

Coached by Mr. Kerry, he could always quote Act and section, to the discomfiture of irate complainants.

'Lay down a broad rule that the office is always right,' said that gentleman, 'and be sure you can't go wrong. And why wouldn't they pay? sure they ought only to be too proud to be let do it.'

'As if this d——d weather was not bad enough, without having the blood drained out of fellows by infernal young whipper-snappers like you,' said one man in the soft goods line to Selwyn. 'Revenue officers, indeed! you're nothing better than a parcel of leeches.'

'It's no use abusing me,' remonstrated Selwyn. 'I have no benefit out of your assessment.'

'You don't stick at a trifle!' retorted the other. 'Why everybody knows you have a switching commission on all you can wring out of us.'

Episodes of this nature were the only incidents that varied the monotony of making out returns, entering the amounts received from collectors, filling up circular notices requesting defaulters to remit within seven days, and occasionally going on circuit to see that no one was sleeping on premises taxed upon the supposition that they were used

solely for business purposes. Mr. Trosdale himself never went on such a quest ; Thistlethwaite and Holt discharged their duty in the bar of some public near suspected quarters, while Selwyn, taking no small amount of trouble, for which he never was thanked, found lamentable confirmation of Mr. Kerry's statements concerning the lack of veracity in her Majesty's subjects, and the want of supervision in her Majesty's servants.

' Not a one of them cares how she is cheated,' said the Irishman, with a mournful shake of his head. ' They never think of all she has to pay, and how badly she wants money ; and what's more, they don't like anybody else to think either, unless it may be that the first of the month is coming, and a month's money with it.'

Selwyn was not in the least morbid, or inclined to discontent, but there were times when it seemed to him awful to consider that he stood at last face to face with his life, and that this was what life promised to be.

The expectations he had formed of a Civil Service career might not have been brilliant, but at least they were very different from the reality.

‘At all events, you will be amongst gentlemen,’ his uncle said confidently, when the lad decided to go in for the examination.

It is quite as well those who love us do not always know how the best laid plans shape themselves. Often as he sat down in his lodgings, or walked through a town where he did not know a creature except his fellow clerks, young Serle felt thankful there was no one to fret about him, no one left from whom to conceal the reality of his position, no one to mourn over the downfall of his fine air-castle.

For it had been fine to him—fine as hope and high spirit and honest purpose and boyish fancy could build it; not very great or grand, perhaps, but graceful and beautiful and homelike.

Well-a-day! sooner or later we all see our castles level with the ground; but it is not everyone who beholds minaret and tower, flying buttress and stately arch and fretted roof fade away so quickly as Selwyn Serle did. It towered almost to heaven as he passed out of Somerset House, and within forty-eight hours it lay a heap of ruins on the Liverpool pavement.

Often in his after life he recalled that first day when he walked up and down dreary back streets, a stranger in a strange town, searching for lodgings—not a friendly hand held out in greeting, not a friendly voice offering him hospitality or even advice. He felt utterly alone and desolate, and when he considered the Inland Revenue Officers, it seemed to him almost that he had fallen amongst a set of ogres.

'Things are not quite so bad as they were then,' thought the young man, as he strode down Bold Street, the rain dripping from his umbrella, while streams quite suggestive of the country poured along the gutter and rushed with gurgling sound down the grating.

There was not much variety to be found in the rooms devoted to third Liverpool. His professional or other duties caused Mr. Trosdale to be so constantly absent that the wonder was to see him in the Surveyor's chair. Mr. Thistlethwaite made it a point of conscience always to follow his principal's example, and invariably showed a clean pair of heels the moment Mr. Trosdale betook

himself to those arduous inspections and appeal cases which seemed of such frequent occurrence. At one period the Assistant from No. 4, or the senior clerk from No. 2, looked in to enliven the solitude of No. 3 ; but such visits of late had not been frequent, and Selwyn often found time hang heavily enough on his hands.

On that very bad morning in October he found neither Mr. Trosdale nor Mr. Thistlethwaite in evidence, so proceeded with such work as he could find till Mr. Kerry came in to pencil another mark on the column and ‘pass the time of day.’

‘Where are they all?’ he asked.

‘I don’t know,’ answered Selwyn.

‘Haven’t you seen them?’

‘No.’

‘This beats everything!’ exclaimed Mr. Kerry, seating himself on the table and hammering a tattoo on the floor with the heel of one boot. ‘What can Trosdale be thinking about? It’s easy to guess where Thistlethwaite is, but I confess Trosdale bothers me entirely. A man with brains who doesn’t drink, or gamble, and who might climb to

the top of the tree if he liked, to neglect his work this way is beyond the beyonds. And there are those in this very building—not a hundred yards from us either—that would as soon do him a bad turn as a good ; and he'll find that out when it is too late, maybe. Are you coming upstairs with me ? No ? Well, I'll go and try to find a morsel for myself before those swaggering ruffians that are worse than ever the locusts were in the land of Egypt clear the board.'

' May good digestion wait on appetite,' laughed Selwyn.

' Faith, it's never digestion fails me, but things to digest, if I am not up a good fifteen minutes before the Custom beasts are let loose for feeding. You'd best come. I don't care what your sorrow may be, it's easier borne full than fasting.'

' I have not any sorrow.'

' Tell that to Rowcroft's baby, not to Daniel Kerry. I don't think it's love, for you are not that sort ; and I don't think you're in debt, for you are not that sort either. I can't well tell what ails you, but I know there's something ; may be it is only that you are thinking long.'

'Thinking long? What do you mean?'

'Well, you are a queer fellow not to understand English when it is spoken to you; but there, I must be off;' and off Mr. Kerry went.

The afternoon was half spent before Mr. Trosdale appeared. Nodding to his assistants, he put his hat on the table, swept a space on his desk clear of papers, and, taking some letters from his pocket, began to write.

So an hour passed without remark from the Surveyor, and almost without interruption from the outer world.

Selwyn finished such work as he could accomplish without referring to his chief, and then, seeing that gentleman was too much absorbed in his own correspondence to devote any time to him, took a sheet of foolscap and began to draw.

A great silence prevailed in the office, a silence that permitted the sound of the cinders falling from the grate to be distinctly heard.

After a time Selwyn got down from his stool and replenished the fire. As he did so

he stole a look at Mr. Trosdale, who, with knitted brow and steady hand, might from his appearance have been penning letters deciding the fate of Europe.

Quietly Selwyn returned to his desk and went on drawing ; outside the rain poured down in torrents ; within the room felt warm and snug : the spirit of the day and place fell upon the Assistant-Surveyor, and, as he sharpened a BB pencil to fill in his sketch, a soothing peace took entire possession of him.

Mentally he was hundreds of miles from Liverpool. He was back in the dear old cottage where he had spent so many happy years. He had but to lift his eyes and look over the sea ; but to listen, and he could hear the creaking of the windlass as it lowered one bucket to the well and brought up another full.

Coming winter and driving storm might be holding high carnival in Liverpool, but in his heart there shone the glory of a summer noon.

Down in the meadows the cows were lying lazily chewing the cud ; in the farm-

yard hens were cackling, cocks crowing, pigeons strutting ; there was the well, shaded by willow and elder trees ; Polly, in a picturesque striped petticoat, a scarlet Garibaldi, and a coarse white apron, was drawing water ; and Selwyn, though absent, still owner of cottage and stock, was reproducing willow and elder trees, and windlass and buxom country lass.

With a firm free hand he touched in all the adjuncts of his picture : the old tiled barn, the kennel, the dog on the chain, sleeping in the sun, the railing and close-cut hedge enclosing the yard. Memory and fancy concocted delightful reproductions of the hundred trifles which had made up so much of the happiness of his boyhood ; but when he came to the windlass quite another class of drawing appeared.

In the one case his strokes were free as a bird on the wing ; in the other they were careful and exact—as in a plan.

‘ What are you drawing ? ’

In an instant summer—Somersetshire—Polly—the old familiar home, had vanished, and Selwyn was standing in the offices of

third Liverpool, startled like one wakened from sleep, looking at Mr. Trosdale with eyes in which the beauty of his happy dream still lingered.

'I beg your pardon,' he said. 'I had finished all the work I could get on with by myself, and as you were writing I did not like to interrupt you.'

'I am not finding any fault,' answered Mr. Trosdale. 'I only ask what you are drawing.'

'Nothing but an old well there was in my uncle's yard.'

'Oh!'

It would be hard to say whether contempt or disgust predominated in the Surveyor's tone.

'Let me look at it,' he added next moment, as if desirous of finding some extenuating circumstance in the affair.

Selwyn handed him the sheet of foolscap in silence, and made a feint of looking over some of his cases while Mr. Trosdale examined the drawing with critical attention.

'You have been wonderfully particular

about the details of your uncle's well,' he remarked at last. 'That part of your sketch is like a plan.'

The artist laughed uneasily.

'It is out of keeping with the accessories, I admit,' he confessed; 'but I was trying to make it like a plan.'

'Why?' and Mr. Trosdale laid the paper on the table, though retaining hold of it, while he looked at Selwyn earnestly—almost eagerly.

'Because my landlord thought he had hit on a new idea about a crane. He is the manager of a small foundry, and seems a clever, practical sort of fellow; but when he told me his notion, I felt sure I had seen something like it before, and told him so. I could not remember where, till it jumped into my head just now.'

Mr. Trosdale took up the drawing again.

'Your landlord must be a great fool,' he remarked.

'Quite the contrary; he is anything but a fool,' retorted Selwyn, not sorry perhaps to be able to revenge his own wrongs while defending another person. 'Originally he

was a moulder, and he has made his way up entirely by his own exertions. I dare say in a few years he will be partner.'

' Still, he knew nothing of a well in which while one bucket comes up full another goes down empty.'

' That is so; but yet, as far as he is concerned, he hit on an original idea.'

' Absurd!' said Mr. Trosdale. ' Don't you understand the business of an inventor is to know everything everyone has done before him?'

' No. I should have thought, in that case, he could leave himself no time to invent anything.'

Though not in the best of humours then, Mr. Trosdale could not help smiling at the evident sincerity of Selwyn's belief.

' Looking at one portion of this,' he said, again lifting the drawing, ' one might think you had studied mechanical drawing.'

' I have studied mechanical drawing,' was the answer.

Mr. Trosdale let the paper fall and stared in undisguised amazement at his Assistant.

‘At one time,’ went on Selwyn, ‘my uncle was advised that it might be well for me to go in for engineering.’

‘Why did you not go in for it?’

‘I hardly know, except that somebody else advised going in for the Civil Service. I liked the notion of the Civil Service best myself.’

‘Better than you like the reality now, I suspect,’ said Mr. Trosdale.

There was an instant’s pause, then :

‘I hope you do not think I am dissatisfied,’ answered the young man.

‘I should be very much surprised if you were satisfied,’ remarked Mr. Trosdale bitterly.

‘But I am satisfied,’ declared Selwyn, as if he had just then come to a complete knowledge of his own sentiments. ‘I have no right to be otherwise. There is no way in which a man can earn his bread which has not some drawback.’

‘You will find plenty in the road you have chosen—that is, if you did choose it,’ said Mr. Trosdale bitterly.

‘No one forced it upon me, at any rate,’

returned Selwyn loyally ; ‘and I am well enough content with it. Only sometimes——’

‘Go on.’

‘I ought not to trouble you with my affairs ; they cannot seem very interesting to you.’

‘I am in the mood to feel interested in your affairs. You were saying that sometimes——’

‘I feel a little lonely. In a little while I shall get over it, no doubt. The work does not trouble me now very much, but it *is* desolate to be in a place where nobody cares whether I come or go—whether I am ill or well, happy or wretched.’

‘But you have friends in Liverpool ?’

‘Except Mr. Kerry—not one.’

‘Kerry is not a bad fellow. Did you know him before you came here ?’

‘No ; I never saw him till my second day in Liverpool.’

‘Do you mean to say, then, you have no old friends or relatives here ?’

‘Not one.’

‘Good heavens !’ ejaculated Mr. Tros-

dale. ‘Good heavens!’ and he fell into a brown study. ‘Why did I not know this before?’ he said, suddenly rousing himself.

To Selwyn the only wonder seemed that his chief knew it then; but he contented himself by modestly remarking :

‘I never should have thought of intruding my private concerns upon you if they had not come out accidentally through this stupid drawing.’

‘Ay, the well—to be sure—to be sure!’ agreed Mr. Trosdale, as if he were thinking of something else.

He walked back to his table as he spoke, then stopped and retraced a step or two.

‘We must have more talk, Mr. Selwyn. I want to see more of you. It is not often Dandison sends me an Assistant in whom I can take the slightest interest. If you look round the offices, you can see the sort of raw material he expects to have worked into some decent pattern. I had lost hope, I confess. You are quite a pleasant surprise to me.’

It had taken nearly three months to sur-

prise him, but Selwyn was not disposed to be over-critical. Young or old, we rarely are so disposed when an insinuated flattery not too gross is addressed to ourselves.

'But we must get to work,' proceeded Mr. Trosdale virtuously, as though a minute unimproved were a thing not to be thought of. 'Which are the cases on which you wished to consult me?'

Selwyn produced his cases, and, having received his information, went hopefully to work, cheered by the interest Mr. Trosdale had evinced.

The Surveyor, on his part, worked steadily on for about half an hour, at the end of which time he pushed his papers aside, and, resting his head on his hand, remained plunged in thought, till Selwyn, after some hesitation, referred to him once again for information.

'Have you any pleasant engagement for to-night, Mr. Serle?' asked his chief, as he handed back the assessment.

'Only to go to my lodgings,' answered the young fellow.

'Then you might as well walk home and have a cup of tea with me. I am not a rich

man,' he hurried on ; 'no one is, in this office. And I am even poorer than I ought to be ; but I don't suppose you will mind that ?'

'Certainly not, except for your own sake,' stammered Selwyn. 'None of my people were rich or even well-to-do.'

'I do not live in a grand house, or in what is called a good neighbourhood,' proceeded Mr. Trosdale, ignoring Selwyn's information about his people ; 'for personal reasons I like to live close to this office. I waste too much time in attending here from ten till six without wasting more in going to and fro.'

Though he was not over-critical, the thought did cross Mr. Serle's mind that his chief often failed to waste the hours mentioned in her Majesty's service.

'So I reside in St. Paul's Square, just off Old Hall Street. I cannot promise you anything much in the way of entertainment, but shall be very happy if you will come and take us as we are.'

'You are very kind,' Selwyn hesitated, 'but I do not like to intrude.'

'There is no one on whom you can intrude, for I have only one daughter, and she is

generally busy about her own concerns. Don't take up any notions of that kind. I tell you the literal fact. I am a poor man, I live as a poor man, I hold myself aloof from society. Voluntarily I scarcely ever ask a human being across my threshold. I can offer no inducement, yet I shall be glad to see you.'

'And I shall be glad to come,' answered Selwyn.

'Then that is settled. Give Tom the letters for post ; lock up, and let us be going. It is striking six, and the rain seems to have given over.'





CHAPTER X.

ST. PAUL'S SQUARE.

THEY walked through the streets almost in utter silence — the younger man full of pleased, excited anticipation, the elder absorbed in thought.

The full tide of Liverpool life was surging along the pavements. The rain had ceased, as Mr. Trosdale remarked; the air was fresh and pleasant; a brisk breeze blowing from the river stirred Selwyn's pulses, and caused his feet to keep step with his own glad feelings.

What he expected to result from the visit to St. Paul's Square, it would be hard to say. Though in many of the best attributes of manhood he had attained his full stature,

small things still pleased him as they might a child. He had kept his boy's heart through trouble and loneliness and hard work. To such a nature, no better or more merciful ordeal could have been ordained, than that which had previously fallen to his lot.

It gave him strength without hardness ; it matured the wood without embittering the fruit. His young breast was full of loyal hope and honest aspiration, while it held no grudging as regarded the success of his neighbour. Naturally he wished much for himself, but he wished no other man less. The rich cotton-brokers, hurrying to catch their trains, were welcome to great houses, valuable pictures, showy horses, rare wines, purple and fine linen, and all the other thousand luxuries money is able to command, but he did not envy them.

He would not have despoiled a creature to enrich himself. Of the world's feast he only desired a modest share.

He was one of earth's contented children. He could take his pleasure and make his play out of the poorest material. A smile, a word, a kindly greeting, sufficed to send him

on his way rejoicing. Whether the hand which swept the chords of his heart was delicately soft or hardened with toil signified not one whit, the ready instrument responded to each kindly touch, and gave out sweet music, of which itself was unconscious. He knew St. Paul's Square, its blackened church, its dreary graveyard, its houses, which held no record of former greatness, which showed none of the beauty of age, but in decay were commonplace and conventional, as in youth they had been drearily respectable, yet an invitation to the grandest mansion would have pleased him less.

He was about to see his chief 'at home ;' to penetrate the mystery which enveloped him ; to make friends with this silent, uncommunicative man, who walked through the streets as if he saw no one of the people they met and passed ; who in his carelessly worn clothes loosely hanging upon his spare figure possessed, as Selwyn could not but notice, a presence and an individuality denied to those who had all their lives been basking in fortune's sunshine.

Mr. Trosdale spoke little as they paced

along ; occasionally he essayed some chance observation, but the noise made by the omnibuses, piled high with passengers, and heavy "floats,"* piled higher with bags, out of which cotton seemed bursting, evidently disconcerted and annoyed him. A man used to go from home to office and office to home without a companion and consequent need for speech, naturally found it trying to keep up conversation with the din of street traffic all around.

It was not till they turned up one of those mean and narrow lanes that connect Old Hall Street with St. Paul's Square, that he drew a long breath of relief and slightly slackened his pace.

' You find yourself pretty quiet in Queen's Road,' he remarked.

' Not very,' Selwyn answered. ' My landlady has four children ; her neighbour on her right eight bantams ; her neighbour to the left, some game hens and a cock—besides ducks ; therefore, when one at night leaves off, another begins ; while in the morning they are each trying which shall make the most noise.'

* Local Name for a Low Waggon.

'And you keep your senses ?'

'Yes ; I have got used to the row. I sleep through it generally ; and my landlady is very good. She does not overcharge me, and she tries her best to make me comfortable.'

'You are a long way from the office.'

'Too long in such weather as we have had since I came to Liverpool ; but I do very well, and it may be fine some day. It is not raining this evening.'

'It will rain again to-night,' said Mr. Trosdale, in a cheerful spirit of prophecy. 'Here is my house, Mr. Serle—and I bid you very heartily welcome to it,' he went on, as he put his key into the lock, and, opening the door, bade Selwyn enter.

'Pray sit down,' finding him a chair in the dining-room, 'while I see where my daughter is.'

Left to himself, Selwyn took a hurried survey of the room, which was rendered bright and cheerful by the glow of a huge turf fire. The furniture was worn and old-fashioned, but the chairs might have come straight from the old home in Somersetshire, and been planted on a Brussels carpet which resembled that in

his uncle's study, inasmuch as every vestige of pattern had been worn off long previously.

A few drawings and, probably rare, engravings hung on the walls, a skeleton clock ticked on the mantel-piece, the fender and fire-irons were brass, and would have delighted the heart of an æsthete. A corner cupboard held china so rare that a collector could scarcely have kept his hands from stealing ; the Pembroke table was spread with a fair white damask cloth, on which were placed cups and saucers—an antiquated tea service—two or three sorts of bread, and some butter made up in delicate little yellow pats.

It was all so much like the home where he had spent so many happy days, that Selwyn forgot for a moment to wonder what Miss Trosdale would be like.

Fancy—founded on Mr. Kerry's enthusiastic praises—had not led him to expect the 'prettiest girl in Lancashire, or for that matter the three kingdoms,' would prove a divinity to his taste.

Mr. Kerry had lauded so many different styles of beauty that it was somewhat difficult to imagine what the appearance of a lady

who seemed to have won the prize of his approval might be ; but, after deep thought, Selwyn came to the conclusion that he should find Miss Trosdale a buxom, bouncing lass, with black hair, red cheeks, a superfluity of smiles and dimples, long gold earrings, a lively manner, and a wealth of words.

His friend had drawn his attention to many young ladies possessed of these and similar charms—characterizing them as ‘swate creatures ;’ but then Mr. Kerry’s heart was ‘big enough,’ as he said, ‘to take in all sorts and sizes’—and consequently golden hair and blue eyes, sometimes celestial noses, and anon aquiline, now ‘roguish little divils,’ and again demure misses ‘making themselves out to be saints,’ excited his admiration.

When he got to the bottom of a second tumbler of punch, he often broke out suddenly into

‘Here’s to the maiden of blushing sixteen,
And here’s to the widow of forty,’

and he would proceed to state : ‘There is many a flower in the world’s garden of women, and sure you wouldn’t be quarrelling with a lily because it isn’t a rose, or a violet because it

isn't like a daffodil.' All which expressions rendered it difficult to determine whether Miss Trosdale might more resemble a daisy or a peony.

While Selwyn was marvelling about Mr. Kerry's 'loveliest flower of all,' his chief returned accompanied by a girl who did not in the least fulfil any preconceived idea concerning her.

As the young fellow bowed, coloured, and took the slim white hand held out in greeting, he could not make up his mind whether he liked Miss Trosdale or not. His one over-mastering feeling was surprise—what charm could such a man as Mr. Kerry have found in this girl, with her refined face, trained voice, and self-possessed manner? The whole thing was unintelligible.

Selwyn had never seen anyone like her before—anyone who instantly cut so deep an impression on his mind. It seemed as if for ever he should not be able to forget her face, as if, at one single glance, it had stamped itself indelibly on his recollection.

And yet it was *not* beautiful. Selwyn told himself decidedly that Miss Trosdale was

not lovely—neither was she pretty—neither, when he came to exhaust the matter, was it her looks which produced such an impression.

He could not define the feeling that seemed to take possession of him. She had as much individuality as her father—yet there was not any real resemblance between them.

'Have you not some cold meat, Madge?' asked the Surveyor. 'I am sure Mr. Serle must be hungry.'

'Certainly. Some shall be brought in a moment,' answered Miss Trosdale; and simple as were the words, they thrilled through Selwyn.

Though he could not have told what the quality was which made her tone cause every nerve in his body to vibrate, he felt them quiver even while he was saying that he could not eat any meat—that he never took any meat with his tea.

'You are quite sure?' asked Miss Trosdale, in a quiet matter-of-fact way.

'Quite,' answered Selwyn, deciding that he did not like her.

She poured out the tea and sat utterly silent

while Mr. Trosdale made conversation with their guest.

Selwyn did his best to second his host's efforts, but he was not at ease. Spite of himself, his eyes would stray towards Miss Trosdale. Already her face was familiar to him, as if he had known it for years, and yet he could not resist a constant desire to study it again.

It was not the thick, dark, wavy hair which attracted him, though that was arranged with surely more artistic simplicity than hair ever was before ; it was not her clear brown eyes, sunny as those of a child, and yet with depths in their expression which puzzled and troubled him ; it was not her delicate complexion, innocent of that red he fancied had won Mr. Kerry's heart ; or her sweet, sensitive mouth, or rounded chin, or fair white throat, on which her head was set so well—no, it was none of these things, but a strength and purpose that seemed to influence her every movement and pervade her very silence.

There was power about her. Selwyn did not know what the quality might be she possessed, but it affected him strangely.

Amongst all the women he had seen—and the women with whom he chanced to have been intimate were all of a good class in life—he had seen none like her.

'Mr. Serle has been more than two months here, Madge, and does not know a creature in Liverpool,' Mr. Trosdale remarked to his daughter, finding she contributed nothing to the general conversational weal.

'That sounds very dreary,' she said politely, though with no great show of interest. Yet she turned towards Selwyn as she spoke, and looked at him with some attention.

'Things are not quite so bad as Mr. Trosdale seems to imagine,' answered the young fellow, trying to laugh, but making a failure of the attempt. 'There is my landlady, who is a very good landlady, and her husband, who sometimes comes up and smokes a pipe in my room; and two or three of our men have been kind enough to spend evenings at my place, and ask me to spend evenings with them. I cannot boast a large circle of acquaintances, certainly, but I am not quite desolate.'

' You must feel very lonely though, and miss all your friends in London sadly,' said Miss Trosdale, with a sympathetic earnestness which made Selwyn think that after all he did like her.

' I have not many friends in London either,' he explained. ' I only stayed there while passing my examination. My home is, at least, it used to be, in Somersetshire.'

His wound was not so green that a touch pained him ; rather, the sense of loss had passed into that stage when it seems a relief to talk about it. He had held his peace for so long—so long. For weary weeks and months he had spoken to no soul save his own concerning the gaps made by death. He had shrunk from seeking sympathy—tried even to refrain from pitying himself ; but just at that moment he felt as if he would have liked Miss Trosdale to say one word which might lead him naturally to tell her about the old house, where those he had loved might dwell again no more.

But she did not utter that or any word—instead, she gave him another cup of tea ; it was good tea—better than any Selwyn could

manage to make for himself in his lodgings ; while Mr. Trosdale, taking up the running, observed that Somersetshire was a very fine county, he believed—he had never been there, however—only in Devon and Cornwall.

Selwyn knew both Devon and Cornwall very well ; and he and his chief went on talking about the scenery and comparing notes of travels till Miss Trosdale, taking advantage of a lull, informed her father there was a good fire in the drawing-room.

‘ Is there ? ’ said Mr. Trosdale. ‘ Perhaps you will come upstairs then, Mr. Serle. If you are fond of music, my daughter will play something for you presently—perhaps you play yourself ? ’

Selwyn disclaimed the latter flattering suggestion, stating at the same time how much he liked to hear other people play.

‘ You are coming, Madge ? ’ suggested Mr. Trosdale, pausing at the door.

‘ I will be up presently,’ she answered. And Selwyn and his chief proceeded to the drawing-room, which was an apartment on the first floor, not much larger than that they had left, by reason of a portion of the length

having been cut off to form a small chamber, the door of which opened from the landing.

'It is but a makeshift of a house,' observed Mr. Trosdale; 'but it suits me.'

Selwyn said very honestly that he thought the house a delightful house—'So warm and comfortable,' he added, looking with contented eyes into the glowing fire.

'I hope you will come to us often then,' remarked Mr. Trosdale hospitably.

A good deal surprised, Selwyn answered that he should be very glad to do so, and that Mr. Trosdale was very kind; and all the time he was thinking how curiously the scents belonging to his Somersetshire home seemed reproduced in this queer, little Liverpool square—the pot-pourri, a faint fragrance of lavender, a penetrating smell of cedar-wood.

And there stood his dead mother's piano, or its double—a rosewood square, by Collard.

He could see the maker's name, for the instrument was open, and it was not quite full compass—not like the Erard at Sea Court; but he knew the tone would be sweet and familiar.

Further between the windows he noticed

an old convex mirror—the very ditto of one in which he had beheld his young face distorted ever since he could remember anything; while the sofa-table might have been twin-brother to that on which he had seen his mother's work lying, just as she put it down for the last time.

It was fortunate, perhaps, that Miss Trosdale entered when he got to this point in his reverie.

'Do you care for bezique, Mr. Serle?' she asked.

Selwyn hesitated.

'I am sure he does not,' interposed her father. 'He would rather hear you play—wouldn't you?'

'Much rather,' answered Selwyn.

'On your own head be it then,' said the girl gravely. And she moved to the piano. Selwyn followed, but was chilled with :

'Thank you, I generally play without notes.'

'And even when she has the music she perfers to turn over for herself,' added Mr. Trosdale. 'Come and make yourself com-

fortable in this armchair. I want to talk to you.'

Though being talked to seemed to Selwyn a singular way of enjoying Miss Trosdale's music, yet feeling it was not for him to object, he took the seat indicated, while Mr. Trosdale drew his chair close beside his guest.

For more than an hour the girl played on—dreamy melodies, fantastic mazurkas, grand sonatas, and still through all she heard the hum of conversation. Mr. Serle spoke little, but her father spoke a great deal. He was talking about new inventions, recent discoveries—in a word, science gossip. Now and then she caught a sentence; but for the most part she heard only scraps, such as, 'Highly interesting,' 'nothing like it has been done since,' 'lacked perseverance,' 'patent lapsed,' 'the usual fate.'

At last, after she had played the slow movement in the Pathetic Sonata, she withdrew her fingers lingeringly from the keys, and sat before the piano quiet.

'Thank you, Madge; that was very beautiful,' exclaimed Mr. Trosdale.

'Thank you, oh! thank you, Miss Trosdale,' said Selwyn, making his escape from the fireplace. 'Are you too tired to play something else?'

'I am not tired,' she answered; 'but I think supper must be ready. Shall we go down, father?'

It seemed to Selwyn but a few minutes since they had come up, and now the pleasant evening was nearly over, and he would soon have to turn out and go back to his lodgings, for which he felt suddenly an unaccountable distaste.

'I am afraid I have stayed very late,' he said, when supper was ended, and he rose to go.

He looked at Miss Trosdale as he made his apology, in hopes, perhaps, that she would answer it was still quite early, but she did nothing of the kind.

'I do not think it is very late,' she observed with judicial calmness, holding out her hand as she spoke.

Mr. Trosdale was much more cordial.

'Must you really go so soon?' he asked.
'Well, I know it is a long distance to your

lodgings ; I will walk a little way with you. I generally turn out for a smoke after supper.'

Miss Trostdale stood till she heard the hall-door close behind them, then she resumed her chair with a heavy sigh, and sat for full fifteen minutes with hands clasped together upon the cloth, thinking—thinking.





CHAPTER XI.

MADGE.

NO matter how much he had desired to keep the fact of his visit to St. Paul's Square a secret from Mr. Kerry's knowledge, it would have proved impossible for Selwyn to do so. The Irishman possessed a childlike curiosity, and was, moreover, a very sleuth-hound when once he scented a mystery. He must become acquainted with the matter sooner or later, and Selwyn decided that, although he need not volunteer information, he had better not attempt any disguise on the subject. He would wait the progress of events; and, as it happened, he had not to wait long.

'That was a fine trick you served me last night,' said Mr. Kerry, entering the office

next morning long before the hour when the machinations of those hated Custom House gentlemen rendered his attendance upstairs imperative.

‘What did I do?’ asked Selwyn.

‘Ay, you may well ask that. What didn’t you do, rather? Sure, you stayed out all night.’

‘That I did not!’ interrupted the culprit.

‘Most part of it, anyhow; and me sitting in your lodgings, fretting myself into a fever about you. And that decent landlady of yours ready for you with a fine fire, and the table spread as if you were a lord, and new-laid eggs fit for a king, and honey, no less, and a brown loaf hot out of the oven would have made a dead man eat, and not a sign of you, or a token, no more than of last year’s swallows. What possessed you to stay out without saying whether you’d ever be back again? What happened to you—where were you after all?’

‘I was at Mr. Trosdale’s.’

‘And what took you to Trosdale’s?’

‘He asked me to go home with him to tea.’

'I like that; it is no good trying to come Alexander over me.'

'I don't know who Alexander may be but I did go to Mr. Trosdale's for all that. He asked me, and I went.'

'To tea, did you say—to tea, no less?'

'To tea.'

'Is it in earnest you are?'

'Yes.'

'This beats all. What did he want out of you?'

'I don't know. Nothing, I should say.'

'Then why did he ask you?'

'Merely from kindness.'

'Get along with you.'

'I am serious. He seemed to think I was lonely—'

'He has been a long time finding it out.'

'Better late than never,' said Selwyn, with a sort of uneasy feeling that personally he had assisted the discovery.

'And so he asked you to tea?'

'He did.'

'Have you a duke for a godfather?'

'Decidedly not.'

'Nor a friend at Court?'

‘Not that I am aware of.’

‘Then I give it up. I always was counted a good hand at guessing riddles and puzzles and the like, but this beats me. That he should ask you to the house he as good as put me out of, is inconceivable. It is beyond the beyonds.’

‘Perhaps he was in a bad humour the day you called?’ suggested Selwyn, anxious to be polite.

‘He is not often in anything else.’

‘He was very pleasant last night, hospitable and genial.’

‘Listen to this! Well, the whole thing is too much for me. To think of you, a boy I may say I have made, being wanted there while Dan Kerry is left out in the cold! Still, Trosdale never did like me, though the Lord alone knows why.’

‘I think you are mistaken, Mr. Kerry. It was only yesterday he said you were not half a bad fellow.’

‘I’m sure I am obliged to him, even for that trifle; but it’s you baffles me. And so he asked you all of such a sudden you hadn’t time to tell that honest woman, your land-

lady, she needn't be looking out for you, and you never went home to put on a clean collar or smarten yourself up a bit.'

'We went straight from here to St. Paul's Square.'

'And you saw the daughter. She was to the fore, wasn't she?'

'Yes, I saw Miss Trosdale.'

'It is of Miss Trosdale, the old man's daughter, I'm talking, and no other. What do you think of her? Isn't she just Diana and all the heathen gods and goddesses rolled into one?'

'I sincerely hope not, Mr. Kerry. My knowledge of the ladies and gentlemen composing the mythology is limited, but for her own sake I trust Miss Trosdale is as unlike them as possible.'

'I haven't to say much acquaintance with them myself,' confessed Mr. Kerry. 'All I mean is, Miss Trosdale is everything she should be.'

'Which, unless report lies confoundedly, most of the goddesses were not,' put in Selwyn.

'Never mind them, tell me what you think

of Trosdale's daughter : you're over head and ears in love with her, of course,' added the Irishman jealously.

' You must think me a very susceptible fellow.'

' Deed I don't ; still, I suppose you won't have the face to tell me you didn't lie awake last night till morning dreaming about her,' observed Mr. Kerry insinuatingly.

' I slept soundly till Mrs. Wells called me, and I didn't dream at all.'

' There is a deal of difference between us then. I lost all of my heart taxes haven't broken the first minute my eyes lit on her, and I'd marry the girl to-morrow if I'd any sort of a place to put her up in.'

' Perhaps she mightn't be willing to marry you,' hinted Selwyn.

' She mightn't,' replied Mr. Kerry, as if such an idea touched the very limit of probability. There ensued a pause : Selwyn was considering how he might best change the conversation, and Mr. Kerry was viewing the changed aspect of affairs from every side.

' You feel quite set up now, I suppose, that you have got the pass of a house men as

good as you, and longer in the office, were never asked to put foot in ?' he said at last.

' I am glad to have found another friend, and that friend my chief,' answered Selwyn with much diplomacy.

' And now you've had all you want out of him you'll be giving Dan Kerry the cut, "go by,"'

' Whatever else I may, be I am not ungrateful,' returned Selwyn in an injured tone, ' and I should indeed be so if I forgot all I owe to you.'

' Ah ! be easy,' said Mr. Kerry ; ' I never did think much of gratitude—it is hanging a millstone round your neck ; and as for the trifle of help I gave you, I would have done as much for anybody, much less one I took to as I did you. For I have liked you very well, and it vexes me a bit to find anybody pushing between us. There, the whole murder is out !—but if we are to spend no more pleasant evenings together, at any rate let us part friends,' and he held out his hand as if bidding an eternal farewell to the toddy and the tobacco, the feast of friendship and the flow of soul he had enjoyed so lavishly since Mr. Serle came to Liverpool.

Selwyn took his hand and shook it heartily.

'Good heavens, Mr. Kerry,' he said, quite shocked, 'what do you suppose has come between us, what do you suppose is likely to come between us? Why should we not spend as many pleasant evenings together in the future as we have in the past? Mr. Trosdale will not ask me to his house again for sometime, if he ever does.'

'It is hard to tell what he may do.'

'At any rate, he won't want me to live my life with him. Let us go up and have some dinner now, and if you are not busy, come to my diggings to-night, and drown your doubts in a glass of punch. My landlord has got me some Irish from a friend he says is not to be equalled.'

'Sure I know,' said Mr. Kerry, with soft pathos. 'Didn't I sample it yesterday evening while I was distracting myself about you?'

'Well, you needn't distract yourself any more; you see nothing has gone wrong with me.'

'That is as it may be.'

'That is as it is,' persisted Selwyn, patting Mr. Kerry on the back. 'Come away, or

else those Custom House fellows won't leave us a chance.'

'Faith, and they won't,' said the Irishman, rallying at the reminder like a war-horse sniffing the battle afar off. But though a struggle for potato pasties and such like dainties might temporarily divert Mr. Kerry's mind, Selwyn soon found that not even gallons of whisky punch, cunningly concocted, and artfully seasoned with conversation which always contained some allusion to Victoria quinto and sexto, could allay the uneasiness engendered by Mr. Trosdale's civility. 'There's something under it all, and one day you'll find that true, when I am lying in my quiet grave maybe,' and Mr. Kerry shed a not unnatural tear at the picture himself had painted.

This remark was made after Selwyn's fourth visit to St. Paul's Square—'The fourth within a fortnight,' commented Mr. Kerry; 'the plot is thickening, I tell you. Trosdale has got a notion about you in his head. I don't know what it is; but mind what I say, he has a notion. My belief points to the conclusion that he has mistaken you for some other person.'

Naturally enough, Selwyn refused to adopt any conclusion so unflattering to himself, and so ungenerous as regarded Mr. Trosdale.

'It is only that he thinks I am lonely, a stranger in a strange place,' he declared, too modest to add the addendum, 'and I think he has taken a fancy to me.'

'And haven't other people been lonely besides you?' argued Mr. Kerry. 'I was lonely once myself, but the devil an invite Trosdale invited me. I was a stranger in a strange place, and what is worse, a strange country, but he never said once, "Come and cut your mutton with us," and when I went to make a friendly call, as one gentleman might on another--assistant or no assistant, chief or no chief—he never asked me to sit down or wet my throat. And you tell me his daughter plays the organ at the black church in the Square. Now there's a thing to let a daughter do! My mind misgives me about the whole business; I wish you had never set foot on Trosdale's doorstep.'

Selwyn certainly could not have echoed this wish. Though he dissembled to Mr. Kerry, life had been happier to him, brighter,

better, ever since the evening when Mr. Trosdale took him to St. Paul's Square. So far he had not fallen into habits of intimacy with his chief, but in lieu of this the glamour of novelty still surrounded his new acquaintances. He did not understand either father or daughter ; but it was pleasant to go to their home, nevertheless. He was at that happy age when people do not trouble themselves about theories, and of that blessed nature which always attributes the best intentions to anyone who makes friendly advances ; and certainly in the matter of Mr. Trosdale's invitations he was not likely to look a gift horse in the mouth.

He felt too glad to escape the tedium of lonely evenings, tempered only by Mr. Kerry's company, to inquire very curiously why and wherefore he alone was singled out for the hospitality of St. Paul's Square.

On the contrary, the distinction so unexpectedly awarded filled his heart with gratitude. St. Paul's Square might not be an exactly fashionable locality. No one—even a stranger in the city—could regard it as the Belgravia of Liverpool ; but the value

of all things is relative, and Selwyn's daily life was spent amongst men who desired greatly to be free of Mr. Trosdale's house.

They believed the Surveyor was rich ; they believed he had influence ; they knew he came of decent people. The scarcely concealed scorn with which he treated his colleagues, and the contempt he evinced for the Commissioners, and, indeed, the whole Civil Service, caused them to consider his intellectual position even higher than his social station.

When people are absolutely in the dark concerning a man's private life—his expenditure, his resources, his employments, his intimates—they are apt to over-estimate not merely his income, but his importance ; and Mr. Trosdale's reputation for wealth, wisdom, and connection was enhanced fifty-fold by the veil of mystery in which he enwrapped himself.

Mr. Cramsey was as absurdly jealous of what he sneeringly called Selwyn's ‘promotion’ as he could possibly be. Thistlethwaite felt virtuously indignant about such a preference

being shown to ‘that young pup.’ Mr. Kerry alternated between suspicions of Mr. Trosdale’s intentions and envy of the ‘snipe’s’ luck. Every soul in the office considered Serle had got a lift, and was more or less indignant in consequence.

‘Who is he,’ they all wanted to know, ‘that Trosdale should take to him after having snubbed us?’

‘I am nobody now,’ mourned Mr. Kerry, ‘and it’s little enough he’d ever have known about taxes but for me. I am heart-sorry to see him going wrong, for he was a fine lad—a lad anybody might have been fond of.’

‘Going wrong’ meant, in Mr. Kerry’s florid language, going home for the fifth time with the Surveyor; and as Selwyn saw the look, full more of sorrow than reproach, the Irishman fixed on him as they met on the stone steps outside the Custom House, he could not help wondering whether in reality he had been very ungrateful to the first friend he found in that strange town. Full of this idea, he looked back and waved his hand. In reply, Mr. Kerry shook his head mourn-

fully. He had been solacing himself after a hard day's work with 'just a taste' of his favourite beverage—'scarce enough to colour the water'—and consequently that shake of the head was very mournful indeed.

More conscience-stricken than ever, Selwyn, while he paced the streets with Mr. Trosdale, could not help feeling it was a very hard thing not to be able to form a new acquaintance without giving offence to an old one.

The Surveyor divined something of all this perhaps, for he said, as they walked along :

' That is a good-hearted creature, though he is somewhat unreasonable. He is always willing to do me a good turn, even while he never can quite forgive me for not making him free of my house.'

There was no possible answer Selwyn felt he could make to this remark except :

' I think Mr. Kerry would do a good turn for anyone.'

' I believe that. He is certainly the best man in the office. Still, he is a rough diamond.'

'A little odd perhaps,' confessed Selwyn, 'but—'

'Odd! He is all odd. There is nothing not odd about him,' said Mr. Trosdale, breaking across his Assistant's sentence. 'A queer fish. Dry land means to him the tax-office, and sea whisky-punch.'

Selwyn laughed even while he said :

'If you knew more of him, I believe you would find that he is possessed of some very sterling qualities. His kindness to me has never flagged. Looking back, I scarcely know how I could have borne my life at all when I first came to Liverpool, but for him.'

'There are excellent traits in Kerry,' admitted Mr. Trosdale, who seemed a trifle unappreciative nevertheless.

'Most certainly there are.'

'I know he has been a friend to you, both in the office and out, so that, though there is another side to the acquaintanceship, I scarcely like to mention it.'

'You need not,' answered Selwyn. 'Of course, I see what you mean, and I have often wished that Mr. Kerry were different in

some ways ; but I was very thankful for his society a few months ago, and I am very glad when he gives me his society now.'

Mr. Trosdale smiled—a cold, wintry smile—which showed he read, or at all events imagined he read, a sub-meaning in Selwyn's words.

' It is not for me to give you advice, but I cannot refrain from venturing on one remark. You know the old saying, " Ill weeds thrive apace "? Yes. Well, then, believe one who is a good deal older than you, that nothing attains such tremendous proportions in a short space of time as an undesirable intimacy.'

For a minute Selwyn walked on, feeling very much as if he had received a slap in the face ; then he looked at Mr. Trosdale, who smiled, and asked :

' Is it not true ?'

' I suppose so,' his Assistant answered ; ' but I was not then considering whether the axiom were true or false. I was only wondering what idea you had in your mind about Mr. Kerry and myself.'

' Mr. Kerry has proved a very useful

friend, I know,' said Mr. Trosdale ; 'but—'

'But we are not Damon and Pythias, if that is what you mean,' interposed Selwyn. 'Neither are we ever likely to be.'

'I am very glad to hear it. That is precisely what I did mean.'

'As you said just now, Mr. Kerry has been a most useful friend. But for him, I should not have known even the little I do about the office work.'

'That is so,' said Mr. Trosdale, with cheerful acquiescence. 'After such an experience as I have had of the young men Mr. Dandison thinks suitable for third Liverpool, I should never have attempted to initiate another into the mysteries of tax-work.'

In view of Mr. Trosdale's recent cordiality, it was not quite easy to hint this determination might involve some hardship to the young men Mr. Dandison considered suitable for third Liverpool; nevertheless Selwyn answered :

'I dare say you have had a great deal of difficulty with incompetent Assistants, and I quite understand how very tired you must

have got of them. Still, that only makes my obligation to Mr. Kerry the greater, for he took immense pains to teach me even the A B C of office-work.'

'Thistlethwaite ought to have initiated you in the business,' said Mr. Trosdale a little sharply. 'I told him you were new to the whole thing, and that he must act as coach.'

'He certainly never even attempted to act as anything of the sort. On the contrary, on the few occasions when he has volunteered information, I have found it to be misleading. Further, I have noticed that he has never allowed a single opportunity to pass of trying to damage me with you.'

'Thistlethwaite is a curious fellow,' replied Mr. Trosdale, receiving Selwyn's statement so quietly, he might have considered one man's desire to ruin another a natural and rather praiseworthy trait. 'He cannot endure the idea of anyone taking the place he occupies with me.'

'I had no desire to supplant him, so he need not have tried to injure me,' said Selwyn, who was very sore on this subject.

'I am not aware that he ever did try to injure you,' rejoined Mr. Trosdale coldly; 'at all events, he has not done so. We have, however, drifted on to a topic about which I wish I were never to hear another word. In all its moods and tenses the office is hateful to me. I have quite enough of it in business hours without talking of it at any other time. What I began incidentally to speak about was your intimacy with Mr. Kerry. As we have spoken about it, let us take a turn round the Square and thresh that matter out before we go indoors.'

So said, so done, they took a turn round the Square, one of them at all events being a good deal surprised by the proposed perigrination.

As Mr. Trosdale remained silent after his outburst about the office, it was Selwyn who took up the vexed question of second Liverpool's Assistant.

'I scarcely see how I could have avoided knowing Mr. Kerry,' he began, 'even had I wished to do so.'

'You could not have avoided knowing him,' Mr. Trosdale agreed, 'being an Assis-

tant-Surveyor yourself, Mr. Kerry being what he is, and both of you working each day under the same roof.'

'Then what is it you object to?' asked Selwyn.

'I—oh, I do not object to anything—I have no right to object; only it seems to me a pity for a young man to make intimate acquaintances he may afterwards find a difficulty in breaking with.'

'I shall never want to break with Mr. Kerry,' Selwyn declared vehemently.

'Perhaps that is quite as well, for I think you will find him stick to you like burr.'

There was such an amount of truth in this that the simile struck Selwyn almost dumb. Nevertheless he managed to say :

'I fancy you overestimate the degree of intimacy that exists between Mr. Kerry and myself. As I told you, we are not Damon and Pythias.'

'And as I told you, I am very glad to hear it.'

'Mr. Kerry has been most kind to me,' went on Selwyn, 'and I have the warmest friendship for him; but I certainly should

never dream of confiding my private concerns to his keeping.'

'That is indeed a most excellent resolution,' commented Mr. Trosdale.

'Or of discussing with him the private concerns of any other friend.'

Selwyn could not in the least have told why he had proceeded to make this statement, but the moment it passed his lips he understood the cause of Mr. Trosdale's anxiety to detach him from Mr. Kerry. He did not wish his affairs canvassed between them, and quite naturally—people do not wish their affairs canvassed by anybody—and then Selwyn's cheeks flamed as he remembered having told the Irishman that Miss Trosdale played the organ in St. Paul's. Well, he would never tell him anything else, and the flush on Selwyn's face deepened. Mr. Trosdale attributed that flush to innocent indignation, and was not ill-pleased to see it.

'I think you are prudent, Mr. Serle,' he said. 'As you know, I am not a man who asks many questions.'

'Indeed you are not,' thought Selwyn, a little bitterly, but he only inclined his head.

‘ Still I feel certain your rank in life is very different from Mr. Kerry’s, and I really think you would do wisely not to commit yourself to him. Perhaps I may seem officious, but I have seen so many people founder on this rock that it is impossible not to speak a word of caution.’

‘ I am very grateful,’ said Selwyn, as indeed he was. ‘ I have not known a great many people in my life, but those I have known best were certainly different from Mr. Kerry. Still, I could hardly pick and choose, and I like Mr. Kerry, and I *ought* to like him,’ added the young fellow in a burst of loyalty which seemed to touch Mr. Trosdale, for he answered :

‘ I think you ought ; all I meant to caution you against was liking him too much ; in other words, committing yourself and your affairs to his keeping, as you expressed the matter a minute ago.’

‘ You need not be afraid of that. I am thankful for your advice, which I will not forget ; but you need not be afraid.’

‘ Discretion is one of the earliest lessons young people require to learn,’ declared

Mr. Trosdale oracularly. ‘I have known a rich man brought to beggary by a schoolboy’s simple confidence in his play-fellow.’

‘How very dreadful!’ exclaimed Selwyn, genuinely shocked.

‘That is by no means an isolated instance. However, I have said my say, and must ask you to excuse me if it has appeared officious.’

‘Indeed it has not,’ answered Selwyn earnestly. ‘I feel infinitely obliged for your advice.’

‘Hereafter you may perhaps have cause to be,’ observed Mr. Trosdale, with a worn and weary smile. ‘Now let us go in and see if tea is ready.’

Tea was ready; indeed, to Selwyn’s fancy it seemed that in St. Paul’s Square everything always was ready; no long ‘waits’ between the acts there. With such a home Mr. Trosdale ought to have been a happy man, yet a child might have seen he was not happy.

‘Why on earth is he not?’ thought Selwyn; ‘and what is the secret he fears I

should tell, which I would not tell even if I knew it ?'

That evening differed from any Selwyn had yet spent under Mr. Trosdale's roof, inasmuch as Madge never left her father and his guest alone, no, not for a minute. She would not play and she did not talk ; she only worked industriously at some wonderful piece of embroidery, and proved a great check upon the conversation.

' What are you so busy about, Madge ?' asked Mr. Trosdale, when, it seemed, he could endure the sight of those swift white fingers plying a bright needle no longer.

' The latest piece of fancy folly, papa,' she answered, pausing in her employment for a moment, and lifting her wonderful eyes that always when he met them caused a thrill to pass through Selwyn's heart.

He could never analyze the feeling those eyes produced, because it was always changing.

' It is unusual to find you engaged on any piece of folly,' said Mr. Trosdale, not without the suspicion of a sneer.

' I am perpetrating this for the St. Canice Bazaar,' she explained.

‘What a waste of time!’ ejaculated Selwyn’s chief.

‘Perhaps. I am not quite sure of that. Of course, if people were willing to give their money without any fuss and trouble, bazaars would not be necessary; but as that seems hopeless, we are forced to manage as we can.’

‘And how do you manage?’

Mr. Trosdale rarely condescended to such trivial conversation, and he did not shine in it.

‘Why, in this case, Mrs. Verinder finds the materials, and I do the work; and some lady keeps a stall who does not mind saying all her things are beautiful, and will sell this among other trumpery, so a church or a charity is benefited.’

‘Wonderful!’ remarked Mr. Trosdale, turning to Selwyn, who was looking at the busy fingers. ‘Were you ever at a bazaar, Mr. Serle?’

‘Often,’ Selwyn answered. ‘We used to have a bazaar at Sea Court Magna once a year.’

‘And you enjoyed it, I am sure!’ said Mr. Trosdale sarcastically.

'I think I did—I know I did; though I am not quite sure whether I should enjoy a bazaar now.'

'You had better get Mr. Serle tickets for St. Canice's, Madge, and let him try.'

'No, I think not,' said Madge pensively; 'the things will be enormously dear, and I am sure Mr. Serle can put his money to a much better use.'

'At least you might give him the choice.'

'If he wants to part with his money not very wisely, there are plenty of openings in Liverpool besides St. Canice,' returned Miss Trosdale, looking straight at Selwyn as she spoke.

'Good Heavens! does she think I am spending my money not very wisely?' considered the young man; and a wild desire came over him to 'have it out' with Miss Trosdale.

He wanted to tell her he was older than she, and not such a simpleton as she evidently thought him; that he knew many things she little suspected, and had thought more than she might be inclined to believe. When he was away from her he made up his

mind resolutely to set himself right with Mr. Trosdale's daughter the next time they both met ; but when they did meet, it was always the same story—she froze him, she stopped the words on his lips, and routed the sentence he was about to speak. Though modest, he had never been shy ; but when in Miss Trosdale's company he felt timid and awkward as the veriest lout. At Sea Court his friends had thought he talked rather well—always pleasantly, and, if the company were sympathetic, sometimes cleverly. In St. Paul's Square he might have been a dolt, for any remark, whether wise or witty, on which he adventured.

' It is very strange,' he thought uneasily ; ' I never felt like this before : no, not even with Mr. Trosdale, though he kept me at arm's length long enough in all conscience.'

He was always worrying and perplexing himself over the Madge Trosdale question. She was as tantalizing as a locked door, which when open might reveal either a fair garden or some gruesome chamber. Oh ! if he only had the key, if he only knew what key to try, he thought sometimes ; and then again

he made an effort to fling the matter from him, by saying scornfully :

‘ Why should I trouble myself about her ? she is not like other women : she has no heart, no feeling ; she is cold as a statue—she is worse than a statue ; that, at least, does not repel.’

But strive as he would he could not get rid of the girl. She walked with him to and from the office, to others an invisible presence, but to Selwyn palpable enough—inscrutable, incomprehensible, maddening !

He lay awake at night thinking about her, he who had never lain awake before, save when sick or in trouble. She roused him in the morning long before it was time to rise, and looked at the young man through the grey dawn with that inscrutable expression which often made him feel as though, like the Sphinx, she had some awful question to propose, which might be the making or undoing of his life.

After a fashion he fought against the influence she was exerting over him. ‘ She is not beautiful like some women I have seen ;’ and this was quite true, but then it

was true also that not one fair face out of the number he had seen ever haunted and harassed him like the face of his chief's daughter.

It pestered him in the same manner as a verse of an old song, or some air heard years ago, will dog the tired brain and refuse to be driven away. When he was not thinking about Miss Trosdale in connection with himself, he was wondering concerning her in general—what she did all day long, where she went, if she had many friends, and if so, who they were, and whether they understood her ; and, as though all this were not enough, he had now the fresh conundrum put before him ; how she could have got the notion he was throwing his money about, perhaps even gambling and going to the dogs.

' If only I could get a chance of speaking plainly to her,' he thought ; but no such chance offered.

Miss Trosdale went on with her work, while Mr. Trosdale, feeling he had devoted enough time to his daughter, St. Canice, and such like frivolities, turned the conversation to the subject of some local doings

which were then interesting the town, and which, discussed in a leisurely and prudent, if not very brilliant, fashion, whiled away the time till supper was announced.

That evening Mr. Trosdale did not volunteer to walk part of the way home with his young friend. He seemed tired and out of sorts, and altogether possessed with a different temper from that which had dwelt in him as they paced round St. Paul's Square discussing Mr. Kerry. The tone, however, in which as he bade Selwyn good-night—and added, ‘Come soon again; remember you cannot come too often to see us’—was heartier than ever; and he stood on the doorstep looking after the young man’s figure till he turned the corner and was lost to sight.

Then he went back into the sitting-room and sat down, looking gloomily first at the table and then into the fire.

Madge brought her work downstairs and resumed it the moment their guest departed. Anyone might have thought she was earning her daily bread, so intent was she on her occupation.

'Why is it?' began Mr. Trosdale, at length breaking the silence, 'that you never can be civil to Mr. Serle ?'

'Am I uncivil?' she asked, laying down her work.

'Yes; I consider so. You do not take the smallest pains to make the young man feel at home here.'

'I do not see why I should,' she answered.

'Don't you? but of course not. It is only the old story again, of which I am growing very weary. I ought to know it well though by this time. I should have remembered it is enough for me to like anyone to ensure your dislike.'

'I do not dislike Mr. Serle.'

'Really, this is wonderful!'

'He is well-mannered, and all that; but he does not seem to me very clever.'

'Allow me to tell you he has excellent abilities,' said Mr. Trosdale angrily, as if the question was one of much greater importance than abilities.

'For his sake I am glad to hear it; for my own, if you mean him to come here often, I can only say I wish he were more amusing.'

‘More what?’ asked Mr. Trosdale in great astonishment.

‘More amusing,’ repeated his daughter with great distinctness.

‘Do you want to be amused?’ inquired her father.

‘Very much indeed.’

Mr. Trosdale fell back in his chair.

‘Good Lord!’ he exclaimed. ‘What next?’

‘Bed, I should think,’ said Madge. ‘Good-night, father,’ she added, kissing him on the forehead. Then, wrapping her embroidery up carefully in some white covering, she went her way.

They had both been skirting a quarrel, and refrained from plunging into one, the experience of years having taught them the great truth, that from a domestic fray neither side can ever come out victorious.

Quarters are so close, the wounds inflicted so severe, the combatants at length gladly creep from the fight, feeling that they have lost much and gained nothing.

For which reason it is prudent never to begin a quarrel with a relation for opponent.

In days gone by there had been bitter wars between Madge and her father, that ended, as wars generally do, in a vast expenditure of time and temper, and no accession of territory.

After one of their fiercest battles, though they scarcely spoke for days, they were really, as regarded the matter in dispute, precisely in the position they had been before it began.





CHAPTER XII.

MR. ASHFORD.

NEXT day the head of third Liverpool had to do what his soul abhorred—attend a batch of appeals.

As he was buttoning up his coat and wrapping a scarf round his throat preparatory to going out in a drizzling sleet, rendered more wretched by a raw, cutting wind, he said to Selwyn :

‘ I wish you would take pity on me this evening. My daughter is going to Mrs. Verinder’s to gossip over some matter connected with that bazaar she spoke of last night, and I shall be all alone. It is not fair to ask you to sacrifice so much of your time, yet I should feel very grateful for your company ; and I have some things to show you.’

Selwyn looked up from his work, genuinely surprised. He had not dreamed of receiving a direct invitation so soon again.

'I shall be very glad to spend the evening with you,' he answered. 'The only thing of which I am afraid is that you may soon find me a bore.'

'No chance of that. Then I shall expect to see you—say at half-past six.' And, just for a second, Mr. Trosdale laid his hand on the young man's shoulder, and looked at him with something very much like affection.

Not for the first time Mr. Kerry's instinct had played him false. He imagined that the Surveyor's tardy advances to young Serle could only be accounted for on the ground that he desired to utilize his Assistant in some way. If it was not money he wanted, it was money's worth.

'He's a deep old fox,' considered the Irishman, 'and I dare say has laid all his plans as square as you please.'

But this conclusion chanced to be totally erroneous. Mr. Trosdale's sudden cordiality to Selwyn arose entirely from a necessity

which is by no means so much recognised as it deserves.

Men, even the most reserved, feel impelled to talk to some one. If they have no person at home to whom they can speak of the things which interest them, they will find some one abroad. It is as natural for people to try and unbosom themselves as it is for rivers to flow to the sea.

A baby, for lack of finding any grown up being who understands infant language, babbles to itself. Heaven only knows what wonderful discoveries it confides to its own strange little soul, in words comprehended by no outsider. Later on the child discourses to its toys. The youngest schoolboy tells the dearest secrets of his short life to a playfellow he has only known a week ; while miss—practising her scales and puzzling over her first French exercise—has vowed eternal friendship and entire communicativeness to Jane, who, on her part, believes nothing but death can ever part them. It is the same all through life—in all ages, in all stations. The college youth has his chum, the artizan his mate, the soldier his comrade.

Whatever the name by which we choose to call the *fides Achates*, his function really is to hear what another person says. This is the reason why good listeners always are blessed with so many friends ; why they are called sensible, prudent, companionable, delightful, which only means that the need to talk is not felt by them so much as by others. They can refrain ; and such a faculty is as useful in travelling through the world as the ability to exist without water proves on a long march.

When Mr. Trosdale, on that very wet day in October, first came to a knowledge of the angel sent to him unawares by Mr. Dandison, he was hungering and thirsting for some one to whom he could talk about many matters lying very near his heart.

If was of no use speaking to Madge. If ever there were an unsympathetic girl on the face of the earth, Mr. Trosdale believed that girl was his own daughter. His wife also had been unsympathetic — either because they chanced to be too practical, or too worldly, or too selfish, or too ignorant, or too unbelieving.

Selfishness, lack of faith, lack of knowledge, lack of imagination, and lack of appreciation, being vices the Surveyor could not endure, he had to get on as best he might, without that help which is only to be obtained by talking very fully and confidentially to some friend who is too wise, or too simple, to contradict us.

But it is essential that friend should have some knowledge of, or feeling for, what we are talking about. It is not needful he should be an expert. A man, for instance, may admire Wagner to his heart's core, and yet not have the power to play a note of music ; and, in like manner, Mr. Trosdale believed, from the time he saw Selwyn reproducing his uncle's well, that, although his education had in many ways been grievously neglected, he was a young man with a great deal in him.

The more he saw of the lad, also, the better he liked him. Absolutely guileless, honest, simple, and loyal, he was a most refreshing change, after the Assistants who had aforetime been sent to third Liverpool.

'If heaven had given me a son,' considered the Surveyor, 'I do not know that I could

have wished him very different from Serle, save in the matter of brains.'

Mr. Trosdale was difficult to please in that respect. Believing himself to be possessed of a lion's share, he naturally conceived the majority of other human beings were poorly endowed with genius.

A favourite theory attains among men of his calibre, that there is only a certain amount of cleverness in the world, which has not been dealt out with strict impartiality.

Such a large slice had been bestowed on Martin Trosdale, poor Selwyn Serle was forced to be content with mere crumbs!

Of these, however, he had made a very good use, the Surveyor decided, very good indeed. His friends were to blame for not having given him a different sort of education; but then friends generally acted wrongly or foolishly in this respect. Indeed, Mr. Trosdale hinted to Selwyn that he himself had suffered from this short-sightedness of friends and relatives, who, he said, 'Make mistakes for which others have to pay the penalty.'

Hitherto Selwyn had only heard of these

things in parables after a fashion, but now he was to be fully enlightened both as to the cause which made Mr. Trosdale regard his official work as a mere dead weight, and the hope which kept him alive even under the oppressions practised by Mr. Dandison. This full confidence was to have been given on the previous evening, had Madge not persisted in remaining where she was not wanted.

Upon her father Miss Trosdale indeed exercised what spiritualists call an ‘antagonistic influence,’ and he could no more have opened his mind freely with his daughter sitting listening to his outpourings than those firm in the faith, can get a table to move when a muscular unbeliever has his hand on it. But that night he would have Selwyn all to himself; and he meant to omit no circumstance of interest, no detail which could aid in giving point and completeness to his narrative.

The strangely assorted pair chanced to meet at the corner of Old Hall Street, and in good spirits proceeded to their destination. Selwyn had not settled whether he felt glad

or sorry that Miss Trosdale was not to be present. He only knew he was pleased to find himself once more in St. Paul's Square.

'Pull off your coat, and come in,' said Mr. Trosdale with cheerful hospitality. 'Should you like to wash your hands? No; then we may as well find our way to the fire at once. Let us have tea directly, Ann. Walk in, Serle, please. Why, Madge!'

'How do you do, Mr. Serle?' said Miss Trosdale, in exactly the same tone in which she had said good-night on the previous evening. 'Mrs. Verinder asked me to defer my visit, papa; so here I am.'

'So I see,' answered the Surveyor drily, after the fashion of a man who was mentally adding, 'It is a bad job; but the Lord's will be done.'—'Is tea ready?' he went on. 'I have been out nearly all day, and shall be very glad of some.'

Spite of gallant efforts on Selwyn's part, conversation flagged during the meal to a painful extent. Mr. Trosdale did not strive to conceal his annoyance, and scarcely contributed a word to the general weal. As for Miss Trosdale, whatever she may have felt,

she concealed her emotion very successfully ; and when Mr. Trosdale at length suggested to his guest that it would be pleasanter in the drawing-room, Madge made no movement to accompany them. Selwyn waited for her to pass out, but, as she said with a smile : ‘ Thank you ; I must remain here for the present,’ he had no option left but to follow his host upstairs.

‘ Find a chair for yourself, will you, Serle ?’ said Mr. Trosdale, who had already thrown himself upon a couch beside the fire. ‘ You won’t mind if I do not talk for a few minutes ? I have a confounded headache. I always do get a headache after I have been to one of those appeals. It will go off if I keep quiet for a little. There are books about somewhere ;’ and the Surveyor forthwith fell into a brown study, in which so dark were his looks and so haggard his expression, it might have seemed he was reviewing all the dismal events of his life.

This is one of the great charms of intimate acquaintanceship ; you see a man at his worst, rather than at his best. Mr. Kerry had a favourite phrase about ‘ fellows who hang up

their fiddles at their own doors.' It is a way many people have, and it is the privilege of friendship to be admitted on private days when the public are rigorously excluded and no music of any sort is to be heard.

Selwyn of course conjectured the true cause of Mr. Trosdale's headache. He had never seen aught but the truest union in families, and the fact that a father and daughter could not stable their horses together jarred on him horribly.

Yet he did not much marvel at it. Though he longed for Miss Trosdale's approval and liking, he still inconsistently enough felt far more at his ease when she was out of the room than when she was in it.

Nevertheless, he would have valued her friendship so much (he had always wished for a sister, and the next best thing to a sister was a kind girl-friend), and tried hard to deserve her good opinion! Why, therefore did she maintain so rigid an attitude towards him? what had he done to offend her? how could he put himself right with her? Idly turning the leaves of a book he had taken up, Selwyn was asking himself these ques-

tions, and losing himself for the hundredth time in the Madge Trosdale labyrinth, when the drawing-room door opened, and the servant announced :

‘ Mr. Ashford, sir.’

Instantly there came an extraordinary change in the Surveyor’s whole demeanour.

If Mr. Trosdale had not appeared elated at the unexpected sight of his daughter, the equally unlooked-for entrance of Mr. Ashford seemed, on the contrary, to excite the keenest delight. Looking at him, Selwyn could scarcely believe it was the man who had, a minute before, been lying beside the fire looking with discontented eyes at the blazing coals, that sprang to his feet with the eager agility of youth, and, stretching out a hand in welcome, exclaimed :

‘ Why, Ashford, is it you? Who would have thought of seeing you?’

‘ Many people, I should say,’ answered the other brusquely, and he came close up to the hearth and, refusing Mr. Trosdale’s offer of a seat, drew a chair forward for himself, and sat down in it without taking the slightest notice of Selwyn.

There is nothing, except being snubbed, young people dislike more than being ignored, and perhaps it was the fact of Mr. Ashford's neglect which affected his estimate of that gentleman.

'Certainly,' he thought, 'I never met a person against whom I conceived a greater prejudice at first sight. What Mr. Trosdale can see in him passes my comprehension.'

What Selwyn saw of Mr. Ashford's outer man, was about five feet ten in height, with no depth of chest, no muscle—nothing but a lean, ill-shaped body—a head covered with lank, dark hair plentifully streaked with grey, a sallow face, cantankerous nose, which seemed formed for the purpose of sniffing out offences, ragged whiskers and still raggeder beard, a starved hungry moustache, which quite failed to hide thin twitching lips and bad teeth. His eyes were the most noticeable feature he possessed—being dark, keen, suspicious, and intensely bright. Selwyn found a fascination in stealing covert glances at them, and speculating on what quality it could be the new-comer owned, which wrought

such an instant change in Mr. Trosdale's manner.

' And how have you been getting on this long time ?' asked the Surveyor, every trace of weariness and dissatisfaction vanishing as if by magic.

' Much as usual. How have you ?'

' Much as usual, also,' answered Mr. Trosdale ; ' progressing a little, but not so fast as I should like.'

' I have been down among the iron people,' said Mr. Ashford, ' and seen a great many of the new processes. By-the-bye, I have brought something that will interest you,' and, putting his hand into one of his coat pockets, he drew out a pamphlet and handed it to Mr. Trosdale, who, as if to indicate that a third person was present, said :

' Let me introduce Mr. Serle to you, Ashford. The Somerset House people sent him to me as Assistant, and he is already my very right hand.'

' Oh !' observed Mr. Ashford, and no words could express the dubious meaning he managed to compress into that interjection.

Selwyn and he had exchanged stiff and

antagonistic bows long before Mr. Trosdale's complimentary sentence was ended.

'He has a pretty skill, also, in mechanical drawing,' went on the Surveyor, with an awkwardness arising from his sense of Mr. Ashford's rudeness.

'Which won't be of much use to him or any one else in the tax-office,' commented that gentleman.

'It is an accomplishment which proved a very pleasant surprise to me, however,' persisted Mr. Trosdale.

'I should not have thought you would have cared about such a thing—but no doubt you understand your own tastes better than I. To revert to what I was saying—I have talked a great deal to several iron-masters, and they all agree that the man who can by simple means effect such a saving as you propose, ought to make his fortune.'

'Of course he ought,' said Mr. Trosdale; 'and he will——'

'And I have obtained the name of a firm who are always open to go into anything that contains even the elements of success.'

'No—really?'

‘And what is more,’ went on Mr. Ashford, with the manner of a player scoring the last trick, ‘I have a letter of introduction to them from the largest ironmaster in the kingdom.’

‘And I am not yet ready!’ exclaimed Mr. Trosdale in a tone of profound despair.

‘That is of no consequence. I thought most probably such might be the case, and suggested leaving the date open—or, rather, inserting no date at all. I have seen and heard of every new idea that is in work up to date, and there is nothing which reduces the cost of production to the same extent as yours. But perhaps I am talking rather too fast,’ he added, turning his eyes towards Selwyn. ‘I suppose, though, your young friend is completely in your confidence.’

‘I have mentioned nothing of my hopes as yet,’ said Mr. Trosdale; ‘but I have no wish to keep any secret from him.’

‘Of course that is your own affair. I agree with the old adage myself—that three people can keep a secret when two are away. But there is no use in talking about that now. The young man, I dare say, knows as much of the affair as I do.’

'I assure you,' broke in Selwyn, 'all you have been saying is as Hebrew to me. I have not the slightest idea to what your conversation relates, and if Mr. Trosdale will excuse me, I should like to say good evening. You must want to talk without restraint.'

'Sit down—sit down,' said the Surveyor for the young man had risen; 'you are not in the least a restraint. Mr. Ashford has merely forestalled part of a communication I fully intended to make this evening. Go on, Ashford—you were talking about the furnaces you have seen. Do those new ones they put up at Craiglarsea fulfil the expectations that were formed of them?'

'Piff!' scoffed Mr. Ashford, with a gesture of disdain. 'A dead failure. Pulling them all down again.'

'You don't mean that——'

'I do mean that; they won't work at all on a large scale. The cost of fuel is more than the value of the metal produced.'

'God bless me!' exclaimed Mr. Trosdale.

'Heide, the patentee, swears they were not properly built. He declares the Scotch

masons made some mull of his instructions, but that is all nonsense. Mr. Clay, the managing partner, told me the work was done under his own supervision, that there is a radical fault in their construction, and that he wishes Heide and his inventions had been at the devil before they risked money on the affair. He never was keen about it, he says ; but Heide, who is a plausible little German, over-persuaded the head of their firm, with the result I have mentioned.'

'I always thought his scheme somewhat too elaborate, yet it seemed likely to prove successful.'

'It is not successful though—all the better for you, too. The absolute simplicity of your process will be its recommendation.'

'And I have simplified it still more since I saw you. I have within the last three weeks got hold of an idea whereby the cost of construction and expense of working may be reduced by quite a fifth.'

'That is good ; but I shouldn't spend any more time now fiddling over those sort of things. You'd better look sharp and get your invention into the market. Other

people—practical people—are devoting their attention to the same subject. It is exciting a great deal of interest, I find, at present, and if you wait for this and the other you may be forestalled after all.'

'I am not much afraid of that,' said Mr. Trosdale confidently.

'Things quite as unlikely have happened,' remarked Mr. Ashford; 'so I repeat, don't let the grass grow under your feet. Patent your notion without any further delay, and let the men whom it concerns form their own opinion of it. If you have the broad principles right, what is the use of pottering over petty details?'

'You do not quite understand,' urged Mr. Trosdale. 'The fact is, for all practical purposes, my invention is now complete.'

'For any practical purpose it never will be complete till you have secured it,' interrupted Mr. Ashford.

'Well, at any rate, the invention is now perfect; but I do not want to take a first step with it till I can see my way to take a second.'

'And you tell me that, after all the money

you have wasted—yes, I repeat, wasted, Trosdale—over a lot of stupid, rubbishing fads, that did no good to yourself or anyone else.'

'There was not one of those fads, as you call them,' retorted Mr. Trosdale, touched in his tenderest point, 'that would not have realized a fortune in any hands less unlucky than mine.'

'That is as it may be. One thing is certain; hitherto you have spent a fortune instead of acquiring one. As I always told you, what you lack is concentration—letting well alone, in fact. Now you have got a good thing, do let it alone. Don't fad—don't go off at a tangent—stick to it—'

'Have I not?'

'And get it patented without delay,' pursued Mr. Ashford, unmindful of the interruption. 'Club all your resources together, and fling a big stake on the board at once. Do not keep the thing dawdling about for months. Pay all the fees together, and have them off your mind. You know as well as I do money can be got. Then you may devote yourself to showing people what your invention really is. Faint heart, remember—'

'Had my heart been faint, it must have broken long ago,' said Mr. Trosdale, with plaintive pathos.

'Supper is ready, father.'

It was Madge who spoke. She had opened the door and crossed the room so quietly, that neither man had heard her entrance nor noticed her presence till, leaning over the back of Mr. Trosdale's chair, she interrupted their conversation by an absolutely commonplace announcement.

Selwyn, who had tried engrossing himself in the *Engineer*, so as not to hear a discussion from which he would gladly have been absent, laid aside the paper, and looked at the girl as she stood behind her father, contemplating Mr. Ashford with an expression in her face the young fellow failed utterly to understand.

'I suppose supper can wait,' retorted Mr. Trosdale, with peevish irritation.

'Certainly, papa, as long as you like,' answered Miss Trosdale.

'I move an amendment,' said Mr. Ashford. 'Do not let us wait for supper. May I have the honour of taking you down, Miss Madge?'

'Many thanks, but the staircase is too narrow for such ceremony,' replied the girl, 'as I think I have mentioned before, Mr. Ashford.'

'You have,' he agreed, 'often; but the fact is, we were talking about making a fortune, and I saw in imagination wide staircases, great halls——'

'And a palace perhaps,' finished Madge, as he paused as if doubtful how to round off his sentence.

'Something very like one, at all events. How admirably you can guess my thoughts! What an age it is since I saw you last, and how charming you are looking! Are you still devoting yourself to the Muses?'

'I am still teaching, if that is what you mean,' answered Miss Trosdale, as she took her place at table.

'That was not exactly what I meant, but it will serve. To revert to what I was saying a moment ago, your father is on the eve of making his fortune.'

'I am very glad to hear such good news.'

'I thought you were going to say you had heard a similar statement ere now, Miss Trosdale.'

'I had no intention of saying anything of the sort,' she answered coldly. 'May I give you some beef, Mr. Ashford?'

'Thank you. I know of old it is useless asking you to let me carve.'

There was something in Mr. Ashford's manner which made Selwyn long to kick him; but, as he reflected, a man cannot always indulge his fancy, which now and then seems a pity.

'And so, while we poor people were sitting quietly at home, you have been here, there, and everywhere,' said Mr. Trosdale, turning to his guest, who was watching Madge cutting beef with a dispassionate regularity suggestive of a schoolmistress.

'Yes; I come from going to and fro upon the earth, like an old friend of your daughter's.' (Madge never lifted her eyes.) 'I had a long turn this time—through the Midlands, then round Sheffield, Mansfield, and Rotherham—then straight to Coatsbridge, Glasgow, Falkirk, and a score more places; then I took a flight back to Wolverhampton, after which I felt so great a longing to see dear old Liverpool again, that I jumped into

the train and came home last night ; and again, as he finished, Mr. Ashford looked at Madge, though his speech was addressed to Mr. Trosdale.

‘I am afraid you had not very good weather while you were away,’ said the Surveyor.

‘Weather ! don’t talk of it, please,’ exclaimed Mr. Ashford. ‘When I was in Glasgow I heard a good Presbyterian say, “ Weel, ef thes esn’t enough to mak’ a mon tern Atheist, tell me.” ’

Mr. Trosdale laughed : the imitation was good, and the sentiment seemed to him natural. At another time he might not have been amused ; but in Mr. Ashford’s presence he expanded like a rose in sunshine.

‘ You can’t have had much more rain than has been vouchsafed to us,’ he remarked. ‘ Rain, rain, rain—nothing but rain, wet nights, wet days, sloppy streets—utter misery, and heaven only knows when the weather is going to mend.’

‘ I don’t believe heaven knows or cares anything about it. Are those walnut pickles beside you, Trosdale ?—much obliged ; walnuts

are a weakness of mine. Now look here, you are an ingenious fellow, always striking fresh oil somewhere, always discovering something new and original. Why not get up a company for the improvement of the British climate ? You want to make your fortune : do that, and it is made. I present you with the idea, and I'll write your prospectus. "This company is formed for the purpose of making it possible to live in England during May, for banishing the east wind from our shores, for providing sunshine during November, dispersing fogs and preventing storms." Science has done more than this, science can do this, science will do this. What do you say, Miss Trosdale—capital notion, is it not ?'

'I fancy Nature would prove more than a match for science,' answered Madge.

'A fig for Nature ! played out long since, my dear young lady ; a stupid blundering old grandmotherly creature, who, though she may or may not have served some useful purpose millions of years ago, is only a hindrance in our go-ahead times. Why, only consider the weather she has been treating us to this year ! Nature must be mad, or drunk, or

doting, to go on deluging the earth as she has done. Farmers ruined, labourers starving, people dying off as fast as they can, glad to get out of such a dismal world, and still the old idiot won't turn off the water. Come, Miss Madge, even you can't, I am sure, find a word to say in favour of the weather we have had for months past.'

'I am not going to say anything against it, at all events,' she retorted with spirit. 'I cannot tell why we have had so much rain; but I am sure there is some good reason for it.'

'I forgot; of course, you find good in everything—at least, in things no one else can.'

Selwyn stole a glance at Miss Trosdale. The longing to kick Mr. Ashford grew almost unbearable; but Madge's face betrayed no feeling which could precipitate such a catastrophe.

'There is no subject on which more nonsense is talked than the subject of Nature,' went on Mr. Ashford, finding no one evinced any burning desire to tramp on the coat-tail he so obviously trailed for that purpose.

Madge lifted her head and opened her

lips as if about to speak, but, thinking better of the matter, remained silent.

‘ You were about to say——,’ suggested Mr. Ashford with trying politeness.

‘ I am not going to say anything,’ she replied.

‘ Then I may go on; your father understands I mean no disrespect to existing authorities, when I declare Nature to be a greatly overrated institution.’

‘ And I agree with you that it is competent for men to prove the greatest assistance to her,’ added Mr. Trosdale.

‘ Thank you; I will now go further, and observe I think it a great pity Nature is permitted to have so much of her own way at this time of day. She goes on muddling matters now much as she did some billions of years ago. Her loose style of work was not of much consequence when there were only mastodons and behemoths, and so forth, to be inconvenienced by it; but now matters ought really to be put on a different footing. What should we say if a whole ship’s company were drowned to gratify some crotchet of the engineer?—and yet that is precisely the

thing Dame Nature in one form or other is doing every hour.'

'Will you have some more beef, Mr. Ashford?' asked Madge.

'If you please. It is so pleasant to be partaking of a meal amongst friends again that I feel quite hungry. I am afraid you do not quite agree with what I have been saying about our dear old Mother Nature, Miss Madge.'

'I do not.'

'That fails to surprise me ; in the first place because, to repeat a remark which is true as trite, women can't reason ; and in the second, because you are too much prejudiced to be able to reason as well even as the majority of your sex.'

'Possibly I cannot reason—very likely that is why I fail to see any sense in talking as you are so fond of doing. It is not Nature you are condemning, Mr. Ashford, but——'

'But what——'

'The Power that created Nature.'

'Shall we say God at once? I am not afraid of speaking of the Power you indicate by its generally received name. I am not

condemning that Power : I merely say it is high time we were allowed to interfere more actively with the operations of Nature. We could restrain, adapt, and improve her handiwork. In many ways we do, I admit ; but we have not half so much authority as we ought to possess. She is a very prodigal ; for instance, if she wants to make a few fish, she provides spawn enough to produce, if all went well, hundreds of thousands. It is the same with everything : the waste which goes on in Nature's household is simply indescribable. And it is always worthless things she brings into existence wholesale—beetles, mosquitos, kittens, caterpillars, gutter children. One would imagine she might with as little trouble give us useful and ornamental men and women as the beings we are forced to mix with ; but no : she goes on turning out useless and noxious creatures as industriously as though she were employed in executing some great task. Don't you agree with me, Mr. Serle ?"

' My prejudices are all in favour of Nature,' answered Selwyn.' ' If you will forgive my saying so, I believe she is going on all

right, even when she seems to us to be a little wrong.'

' You are a very foolish young man.'

' It is not impossible; at any rate, I cannot prove that I am a wise one,' answered Selwyn, making a brave fight to keep his temper.

' Mr. Serle does not understand what you are driving at,' said Mr. Trosdale, speaking in the new and original character of peacemaker.

' What I am driving at is this,' observed Mr. Ashford dictatorially. ' Somehow things were set going a long, long time back—no offence to you, Miss Trosdale, intended by this statement, or to any other member of the company—and what we call, for want of a better word, Nature has been pottering on in the same groove ever since. There have been great changes in the world, but she ignores them. She hails when the fruit is setting, rains without rhyme or reason, sometimes takes a notion to scorch us up, and again strips the roofs off our houses. If these actions be really governed by laws, as wiseacres assure us, it is quite time we set

ourselves to work to counteract them. That such weather as we have had this year can be good for man or beast I utterly deny. There should be some sense in all things ; and how any rational creature can conceive these deluges of rain serve any useful end passes my comprehension.'

There was a pause. Whatever Mr. Trosdale's sentiments, he did not exactly care to applaud.

After all, it is one thing to grumble, and another to hear those grumblings carried out to their legitimate conclusion. Selwyn, whose lot had been cast in safe places, where advanced thoughts on any subject were not held in much esteem, remained silent, too much surprised to speak ; while Miss Trosdale also held her peace, partly because she knew the whole conversation was meant to vex her, and partly for the reason that she did not wish to address a single word to Mr. Ashford she could avoid uttering.

'Well,' said that gentleman at last, looking at her with a meaning smile, 'are you of my mind about the matter ? I am sure you are, though you won't say so.'

'Did you ever read the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel?' asked Madge.

'What, through? Certainly not!'

'At the end of the fourteenth chapter,' went on the girl calmly.

'You will find——' put in Mr. Ashford derisively.

'After speaking of the four sore judgments that were to be sent on Jerusalem, and other matters which probably would not interest you——'

'Not in the least, I assure you.'

'The Lord says,' persisted Madge—and Selwyn wondered at her resolution even more than at her patience, "And ye shall know that I have not done without a cause all that I have done."

Mr. Ashford turned to Mr. Trosdale and laughed.

'Chapter and verse, my friend. Was there ever such a girl? But I am not convinced, and I am not converted, Miss Madge. I believe your daughter is in love with some parson, Trosdale. You had better keep an eye on her.' Which suggestion the young lady heard with an expression of such infinite

contempt that Mr. Ashford thought it prudent to change the conversation to politics—a theme, however, which found as little favour with the father as love had with the daughter.

He cared nothing for who was in or who was out. He had no predilection for Liberal or Tory—‘all thieves alike,’ was his comprehensive summary. And, as Selwyn did not incline to air his own views, Mr. Ashford’s eloquence was wasted on almost empty benches.

Conversation dragged unmistakably, and, though it was not late when the honourable member in possession of the house pushed back his chair and said, ‘Bless me, I must be off! I had no idea it was nearly ten o’clock,’ everyone felt relieved.

‘I will walk a little way with you,’ volunteered Mr. Trosdale while the farewells were being spoken. ‘Don’t run away yet, Mr. Serle, please—I want to speak to you. I will be back directly.’ And so he got across the hall and out into the night in company with Mr. Ashford, leaving Selwyn in as uncomfortable a predicament as a young fellow could well find himself.

He remained, uncertain what to do ; for Miss Trosdale, turning her back on the table, had crossed over to the fire, where she stood with hands loosely clasped before her, almost moaning out the words, ‘ That man, that man ! ’

‘ Shall I ? ’ Selwyn began ; but she did not take the slightest notice of his question or his presence—had, indeed, forgotten he was in existence.

‘ Shall I go and kick him ? ’ was what he meant to say ; for the idea crossed his mind that Mr. Ashford could not have put such a space between himself and St. Paul’s Square as to render that feat immediately impossible.

A second look at Miss Trosdale’s motionless figure, the conviction that she had passed into a land of thought where his voice was able to wake no echo, prevented the utterance of what filled his heart. There was no passion in her attitude, unless, indeed, it might be the passion of despair. As in a mirror, he, an outsider, beheld a similitude of trouble in which he had no part, and he remained mute, like one who, having unwittingly read a portion of some letter not meant for

his eye, tries at one and the same time to conceal his knowledge and forget it.

How long their dual silence lasted Selwyn never afterwards could tell. It seemed to him to have endured through hours. He was lost in a maze of conjecture concerning his chief's daughter and Mr. Ashford, when Miss Trosdale, turning suddenly towards him, broke across his reverie by asking :

‘ Did you speak ?’

He had not spoken *then*. Afterwards he wondered whether his sentence, begun so long before, could have been all that time travelling to her ear. It was a strange notion, yet when days and weeks had elapsed he found the idea still recurring.

‘ I did not speak,’ he answered. ‘ I was wondering,’ he went on, with a shy awkwardness which vexed and surprised him, ‘ whether Mr. Trosdale would be long.’

‘ There is no telling. You need not wait for him, you know.’

‘ He asked me to do so,’ Selwyn dissented, deciding that he knew at last why he did not like Miss Trosdale, and never felt quite comfortable with her.

'Oh! very well,' answered Madge resignedly; 'won't you sit down?'

A less encouraging invitation, more absolute indifference as to whether he accepted it or not, could scarcely be conceived. Selwyn felt the chill of her forced courtesy, all the awkwardness of his own position; nevertheless he sat down. To do so seemed the lesser evil.

Madge dropped into a deep armchair, and taking up some work, began to talk on indifferent subjects. She was easy enough; not so Selwyn. Though they had met many times previously, this was the first occasion when they found themselves embarked on a *tête-à-tête* of indefinite duration.

The Square was very still: scarce a sound broke the night silence; for all stir of life about them they might have been two shipwrecked mariners on an uninhabited island, yet Miss Trosdale took the situation quite as a matter of course.

Selwyn, on the contrary, felt strangely shy. Her very self-possession upset him. She made him feel a nobody—a boy, to whom she must be coldly civil, but who was

in her way for all that. He wondered what she would be doing if he was not there. Scarcely crocheting so industriously ; certainly not crocheting, he decided. Thus, even while answering her indifferent questions and remarks, he again fell to wondering what her daily life was.

She had told Mr. Ashford she still went on teaching. Could this thing really be ? and if it were, how did it happen ? Why should she teach ? what secret underlay Mr. Trostdale's discontent, and caused the incongruity of his life.

Why should the daughter of a man in his position teach ? What did she teach ? She did not look like a person who taught anything : she more resembled a woman engaged in a great mission, abstracted from the common concerns of everyday existence. There was something very strange about her—stranger about her even than about Mr. Trostdale.

Just as he had arrived at this conclusion, the clock on the mantelpiece chimed three-quarters past ten.

Madge glanced up.

'Do you know, Mr. Serle,' she said, 'I think it is hardly worth your while to wait any longer for my father. When he gets with Mr. Ashford there is no counting upon him. Very likely he has quite forgotten you are here, and may not return for hours. If he should come back soon, I will explain to him why you went. Good-night!'

Selwyn, not waiting to be asked to go twice, was already on his feet.

'I hope it is fine, and that you may not have a wet walk,' went on Madge.

There was some cordiality in her tone, but Selwyn felt very surely it was a cordiality induced only by the prospect of getting rid of him.

'I don't like her. I do NOT like her!' he thought, and he walked down the steps and into the Square very hot and angry, though Miss Trosdale came with him to the hall door and held it open till he had frigidly taken off his hat and was striding away through the darkness towards Everton.



CHAPTER XIII.

IN SELWYN'S LODGINGS.

QUITE decided that he did not like, could never like, Miss Trosdale, Selwyn Serle hurried on through the night with that haste which the feeling of having been turned morally out into the cold usually inspires.

As he walked his irritation somewhat subsided, but he fully resolved to be ‘engaged’ next time Mr. Trosdale asked him to his house, and let that gentleman’s daughter see he was by no means anxious to thrust himself where he seemed not to be wanted.

Hitherto Selwyn had been accustomed to hearty welcomes and cordial smiles, and why, he very naturally—if irritably—asked himself, should he trouble his head about the whims of

a young lady whose welcome was not hearty, or smile cordial ? There were plenty of other people in the world beside Miss Trosdale. St. Paul's Square did not exhaust the habitable and tenanted places on earth. He had felt very chivalrous for Miss Trosdale that evening, and then she thrust him back, saying he need not wait, as if it was so great a pleasure to wait ; as if he were a messenger ; as if—as if—

Selwyn was not a morbid young man, finding offence where no offence had been intended ; but he owned his full complement of sense, and he could not avoid seeing that while Mr. Trosdale liked him to come to St. Paul's Square, Miss Trosdale would have liked him to stay away.

Not in the least a flattering conclusion at which to arrive ; but there was no help for it. He felt forced to admit the fact that Miss Trosdale preferred his absence to his presence, and it annoyed him very much ; more, it hurt him, for he would have liked to like her, and he could not but see she did not like him.

‘ It is impossible to care for a person who

shows plainly that she thinks you objectionable rather than otherwise.'

And, spurred on by this disagreeable reflection, Selwyn again quickened his pace and hurried through Dale Street as if a fiend were after him.

He would probably have pursued his wild career up London Road at the same mad rate, had he not been unexpectedly stopped by a person coming along William Brown Street, who exclaimed :

'Why, is that you, Serle ?'

It was Mr. Trosdale, and his appearance and his question pulled Selwyn up instantly.

'Why did you not wait for me ?' asked the Surveyor. 'I have been detained a little longer than I expected, but I was hastening home, making sure I should find you in St. Paul's Square ; I wanted to speak to you particularly.'

'It grew late, and Miss Trosdale seemed to think the time of your return uncertain, so I came away ; but I will walk part of the way back with you, if you will allow me,' volunteered Selwyn, a little ashamed of the wild haste with which

he had been shaking the dust of Mr. Trosdale's abode off his feet. After all, that gentleman was not answerable for a young girl's whims.

'No; let me walk with you,' answered Mr. Trosdale. 'I have a fancy for walking to-night. I should like nothing better than to walk till morning. You live in Queen's Road, don't you? We can talk as we go.'

And so saying, he slipped his hand through Selwyn's arm; and in this fashion the strangely-matched pair proceeded towards Everton.

'Ashford is a curious fellow, isn't he?' began Mr. Trosdale, plunging into his subject at once.

Selwyn would have liked to answer that he thought Mr. Ashford a hateful fellow, a detestable fellow, a fellow so utterly beyond the pale of all humanity, that he hoped he should never see him again, or hear him speak, or be afflicted by the sound of his name; but in the present imperfect state of society we can rarely say what we think, and young Mr. Serle, like many another individual, had now and then to choke back

utterances more excellent in his opinion than any that ever passed his lips.

'He does seem a little curious,' he said, with diplomatic caution.

'But true,' urged Mr. Trosdale eagerly ; 'true as steel. He has been a staunch friend to me : no man ever was a stancher friend to man !'

Though he had doubts as to whether Mr. Ashford could be a friend to anyone, Selwyn did not say so ; and the Surveyor, taking silence for assent, proceeded :

'Through doubt, and discouragement, and painful rebuff, and the sneers of ignorance ; through bad report—for, till one is successful, there is little good reported of one—Mr. Ashford has stood by me. But for his sympathy, I must have fainted by the way ; and yet, to look at him, who would think he possessed those grand qualities—faith and patience.'

Selwyn, at all events, would not ; but again he found himself tongue-tied as regarded his real sentiments, and compelled to murmur :

'It is not always safe to judge from appearances.'

'Stick to that,' said Mr. Trosdale approvingly, 'and you will do. Never let yourself be led away by impulse; that is the rock women split on. They are led by nothing but impulse. My daughter is a striking example of this. She is the best creature in the world so long as she lets her reason and natural amiability have fair play; but the most prejudiced, the most foolish, the most obstinate being in the world when once she abandons herself to the promptings of what she calls feeling. Now she cannot endure Mr. Ashford. It is with great difficulty I am able to induce her to be ordinarily courteous to him. Perhaps you noticed some tendency of the sort this evening.'

Here was a dilemma for Selwyn; but he got out of it cleverly enough by saying:

'I did remark that Miss Trosdale's manner was a little distant towards Mr. Ashford.'

'Do you know the reason?'

Selwyn certainly did not, and said so.

'She is jealous,' Mr. Trosdale explained. ('Of what—of whom, in Heaven's name?' thought Selwyn.) 'That is Madge's great fault, poor child! She inherits it from her

mother. Very few people suspect the failing ; but as I hope to see a great deal of you, it is better you should know it. Madge is aware I like Mr. Ashford, therefore she dislikes him. This is her invariable practice. The moment I express a partiality for anyone, that moment she conceives an antipathy against him.'

Selwyn heard this statement with mixed feelings. He was not particularly gratified at being included in any condemnation with Mr. Ashford, yet he could not but acknowledge a certain satisfaction in thus learning that Miss Trosdale's evident disfavour towards himself had no deeper root than antagonism to her father's favour. It was not to Selwyn Serle she objected ; only to the young man for whom Mr. Trosdale had conceived a liking.

'I can conquer that antipathy,' he decided, with the arrogance of youth. 'I will make her think well of me yet.'

It was pleasant to know this girl, of whom he had hitherto stood somewhat in awe, did not rise superior to the weaknesses of her sex. To find that a young lady, with whom

he is certain to be thrown often in contact, is, after all, only very human, cannot fail to prove agreeable to a young man.

In a moment Selwyn's rapid imagination had decided on the manner he would assume, and the course of action he would adopt, towards Miss Trosdale.

He did not mean to let her see he knew the secret of her coldness, but she should be convinced by delicate trifles that the last thing in the world he desired was to step between her father and herself—that, while grateful for Mr. Trosdale's kindness, he would rather do without kindness for ever than usurp the smallest portion of what belonged to her by right. He became so absorbed in the consideration of all the things he would say and all the things he would do to assure Miss Trosdale that one person, at least, in the world was loyal, that he did not see they were out of London Road, or feel the rain which began to fall smartly, or hear Mr. Trosdale, who, having once started on the theme of woman's folly and Madge's unreasonableness, and how hard it was for him to have to contend, not merely with misfortune, but against the

endless whims and non-appreciation of women, was not likely to change it for some time.

'But it always has been, and always will be the case, I suppose,' were the words which at length attracted Selwyn's attention just when they reached Brunswick Road. 'As a prophet is never without honour save in his own country and amongst his own people, so every man, from the first inventor down to the last, has been deemed a dullard at home. My daughter has no more appreciation of or belief in my blast furnace, than if I were a child babbling about something of which I knew nothing.'

'I beg your pardon,' said Selwyn.

'Don't you understand Madge has seen me struggling against Fortune's most adverse winds, and now, when at last the current is setting in my favour, she cannot find a single encouraging or even sympathetic word to say?'

The metaphor was very mixed—absurdly so, in fact—but no jumble of the sort sufficed to explain the puzzled look on Selwyn's face, which a friendly gas-lamp brought at that moment into full distinctness.

'You seem not quite to comprehend,' ob-

served Mr. Trosdale, a little irritably. ‘ You remember what Mr. Ashford said about blast furnaces ? It appears not one answers as it ought.’

‘ I tried to hear as little of your conversation as possible,’ said Selwyn, in explanation and apology.

‘ But, good Heavens ! I meant you to hear every word. I hoped it might save me the trouble of a long statement of troublesome facts. Surely you gathered that I had staked my all on a venture which is really going to turn out prosperous?’

‘ I am very glad to hear it,’ answered Selwyn simply ; ‘ but, indeed, I did not listen to what you and Mr. Ashford were saying. I felt myself *de trop*, and would gladly have left when the conversation commenced.’

‘ *De trop* ! Why, I meant to take you into my confidence this very evening. I asked you to come to the Square for that express purpose. I thought, “ I will have no secrets from this young fellow, who seems so intelligent, and has, besides, a taste for mechanics.” Surely, by this time we ought to be near those diggings of yours.’

It would not have surprised Selwyn more perhaps to hear an angel talking slang, than it did to listen to such an expression from his chief ; but he was not shocked. Though from an angel the phrase would have sounded familiarly, terribly familiarly condescending, on the part of Mr. Trosdale it seemed only affable.

'We are quite close,' he said eagerly. 'You will come in, I hope. I should feel so much honoured.'

Mr. Trosdale accepted the invitation with a gracious inclination and one of his rare smiles. His must have been a heart of stone had the young fellow's innocent guilelessness failed to touch some answering chord.

Many days — many, many — had passed since he met anything so simple, so boyish, and yet, withal, so promising as Selwyn.

He had but to put out his hand to take the lad for better for worse, for richer for poorer — an awful responsibility ; yet he did not hesitate. He accepted the responsibility, and took him.

Hesitation, when what he desired happened to be in question, was a feeling which

never troubled Mr. Trosdale. If he were absolutely sure of one thing, it was that he never could be wrong.

As a young man, he had been accounted a very pleasant, if somewhat impetuous and headstrong, fellow, and perhaps the secret of this popularity was that he never was in doubt. The rest of the world might be mistaken, foolish, sinful — but Martin Trosdale never.

Like many another, he carried the peculiarities of early life, uncorrected and unsoftened, into middle age ; and as he grew older still, they hardened, till satisfaction with himself and dissatisfaction with others became bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

It proved an awful union, and the fruit it bore was misery to all with whom he came intimately in contact.

Where one differently constituted might have shrunk from dragging a young life, with possibilities of happiness, with the future all to come out of which to make a good or bad story for the volume that must be bound in the great eternity, he beckoned on, quite confident of his road, and said

'Come with me' as light-heartedly as though certain he was leading through the plains of temporal prosperity to realms of eternal bliss.

It was impossible to accuse him of acting with *malice prepense*, for he never thought of any human being but himself.

Broken lives, broken hearts, broken fortunes, troubled his mind not one bit. To him they seemed all but as the battered toys with which a child amuses his foolishness ; when they had served his purpose they might be cast aside without a regret.

Selwyn was his latest toy, a toy which possessed one great advantage over many toys, that it was certainly not devoid of intelligence.

Fancy the charm to a girl of a doll which, if a trifle silent, could hear and sympathize.

Selwyn could hear and sympathize ; further, his power of listening was marvellous—unprecedented. Not even that paragon, Mr. Ashford, had ever received Mr. Trosdale's words of wisdom in such silence and with such absorbed attention.

By this time they had, in a blinding rain,

reached Queen's Road, where Selwyn, putting his key in the lock of No. 299, opened the door, and standing aside to let his chief pass, said with a certain pleasant shyness :

'Welcome to my present home, Mr. Trosdale. Some day I may be able to welcome you to a better.'

'Thank you,' said Mr. Trosdale gravely ; but he said no more, for the first ghost of an idea had struck him, with which much speech might have interfered.

The gas was turned low in the sitting-room, but a touch made a pleasant glow of light, and showed Selwyn's neglected tea equipage placed ready for his return, and the dying embers of a fire which was almost out, while a kettle, which had long ceased simmering, stood on the hob.

The whole was a picture of the young man's lonely existence ; it was life in lodgings presented in a concrete form—not uncomfortable lodgings by any means, but solitary.

Selwyn threw some bavins on the fire, which soon catching, sent trains of sparks cheerfully up the chimney ; on the top of the wood he placed the kettle ; then from the

sideboard he produced glasses, and what Mr. Kerry comprehensively called ‘the materials’; and when his arrangements were complete, said :

‘I have no wine, Mr. Trosdale; but perhaps you will take a little hot whisky and water after your walk?’

‘Thank you,’ replied the Surveyor. ‘I have no doubt your whisky is good.’

‘Kerry admits that.’

‘Then it must be, for there is no better judge of strong liquor in Liverpool.’

It occurred to Selwyn that there were many good judges of strong liquors in the Tax-Office, but he did not say so. He had been once too ready of speech in the matter of Mr. Cramsey, and he was daily learning the sweetness and beauty of reticence.

‘You have to wait on yourself here, I see,’ remarked Mr. Trosdale, as Selwyn returned from the sideboard with spoons.

‘Mrs. Wills gives me very fair attendance,’ answered Selwyn; ‘but the family go to bed early. They are obliged to do so, as it is needful for them to turn out at unearthly hours in the morning.’

'Oh!' said Mr. Trodsdale, and he sipped his punch meditatively.

Selwyn did not speak for a few seconds; he looked at the fire now burning brightly, at his chief, who swallowed his whisky and water as if he were solving a problem, at the cheerful blaze again, and then he took heart and began :

'Won't you tell me now a little about that undertaking which is turning out so well?'

Mr. Trodsdale smiled. It was a cold smile, yet it changed the whole expression of his face, just as a gleam of sunshine, frosty and transient though it may be, lights up the gloom of some winter day.

'I fear I must first explain the nature of my invention.'

'Invention!' repeated Selwyn, as though an invention were a rare and superior creation.

His lot had not lain among inventors. He had never scanned the patent lists, and learned they are plentiful as blackberries in October.

'For more than half my life,' proceeded Mr. Trodsdale, 'I have spent my time, my

strength, and my substance, for the benefit of my fellow-men ; I have worked on under every disadvantage, in the teeth of all the adverse winds that blow ; I have been considered a visionary enthusiast ; I have been assailed with reproaches ; in my own household the finest products of my brain have been at best looked upon as the dreams of a lunatic ; I have been blamed for using the talents vouchsafed to me, instead of burying them in a napkin ; while others were thinking of nothing save themselves and their own pleasure, I have sought to fathom the mysteries of Nature, and wrest her secrets from Science ; I have seen my ideas stolen, my plans frustrated, the offspring of my brain coolly appropriated ; yet I never lost courage or heart ; and now—now I am going to reap my reward : I have perfected *the* blast furnace of the century—the blast furnace destined to supersede all others—the blast furnace which must make the fortunes of all connected with it.'

Selwyn had held his breath while Mr. Trosdale impetuously delivered himself of this peroration, and at its finish he almost

gasped at the glorious future his chief indicated.

To many, a blast furnace would have represented nothing. It is not given to everyone to understand the length and breadth, the height and depth of the beauty comprised in those two words ; but Selwyn had sat at the feet of an enthusiast in such matters.

He had listened for friendship's sake to talk about meltings and pigs, and mouldings and castings, from Mr. Adams' nephew ; just as he had listened for friendship and sympathy's sake to the heir of Sea Court, when he discoursed at length about that famous run with the Cotswold Foxhounds, or that never-to-be-forgotten spin after the Narrow Moor Harriers.

Thus it came to pass that he at least knew something of the nature of a blast furnace, and understood it served a purpose not to be comprehended by the multitude. Formerly he had thought, if he thought about the matter at all, that one blast furnace was the twin brother of its fellow, but now he saw he must have been wrong, and felt grateful to his instructor.

There was no need for him to express his pleasure at the confidence Mr. Trosdale had extended. It shone in every line of his face, in his sparkling eyes, his half-open mouth, his interested expression, his uplifted head.

'I hope with all my heart,' he said, 'the invention may prove successful beyond your greatest expectations.'

Mr. Trosdale's punch was exactly to his liking. The whisky was indeed 'sans peur et sans reproche,' the water piping hot, the room most comfortable. He would have liked to stay there all night.

'You are a thoroughly good young fellow,' he answered. 'Strange that I should have thought it a hard fate which sent you to me. How little we know, and how impossible it is to tell! That was quite a misunderstanding on my part, Mr. Serle,' he went on with the air of a man pleading guilty to some heinous sin. 'I felt wronged when I found Dandison had palmed another beginner off on me. It is a thing he is always doing; but I am thankful now he did send you. If I could be grateful to Dandison I should feel so now.'

'I feel grateful to him,' answered Selwyn.
I am very glad he sent me to Liverpool and
to you, *very* glad.'

He did not know, this lad, what was in store
for him when he spoke ; yet if he had it is
most likely he would still have repeated 'I
am very glad.'

His was one of those natures we are some-
what apt to despise, which can pass through
wrong and sorrow and come forth, not em-
bittered, but strengthened. As bees are able
to extract honey from even poisonous flowers,
so Selwyn Serle found good nourishment
while browsing upon the unlikely pastures of
which Mr. Trosdale made him free.

'I meant to tell you all this in the Square,
had we been alone this evening,' said Mr.
Trosdale, meditatively stirring his punch
while he reverted to the only theme which
had power to attract and retain him. 'I in-
tended to show you the schemes of which
richer men have robbed me, the ideas I
lacked means and influence to force on the
public, that have since resulted in fortunes
and titles to persons absolutely destitute of
brains ; but my daughter's return prevented

me. Now, when I can help it, I never speak before Madge of the things which are almost as dear to me as she is—’.

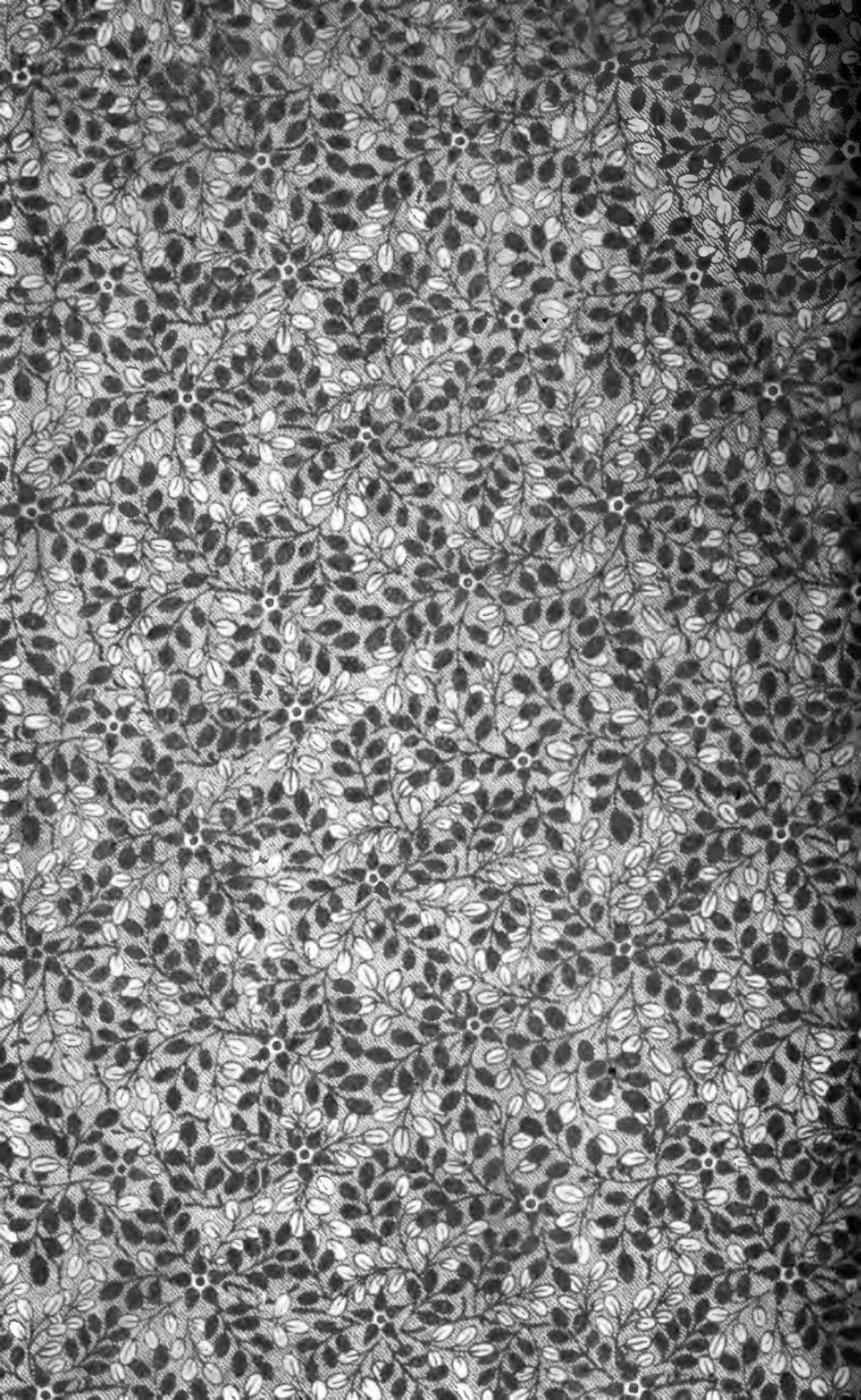
‘Miss Trodstone cannot know,’ interposed Selwyn, forgetful of all personal wrongs, and only anxious to begin that work of setting the relations between father and child right which he had chivalrously set himself; ‘if she understood—’.

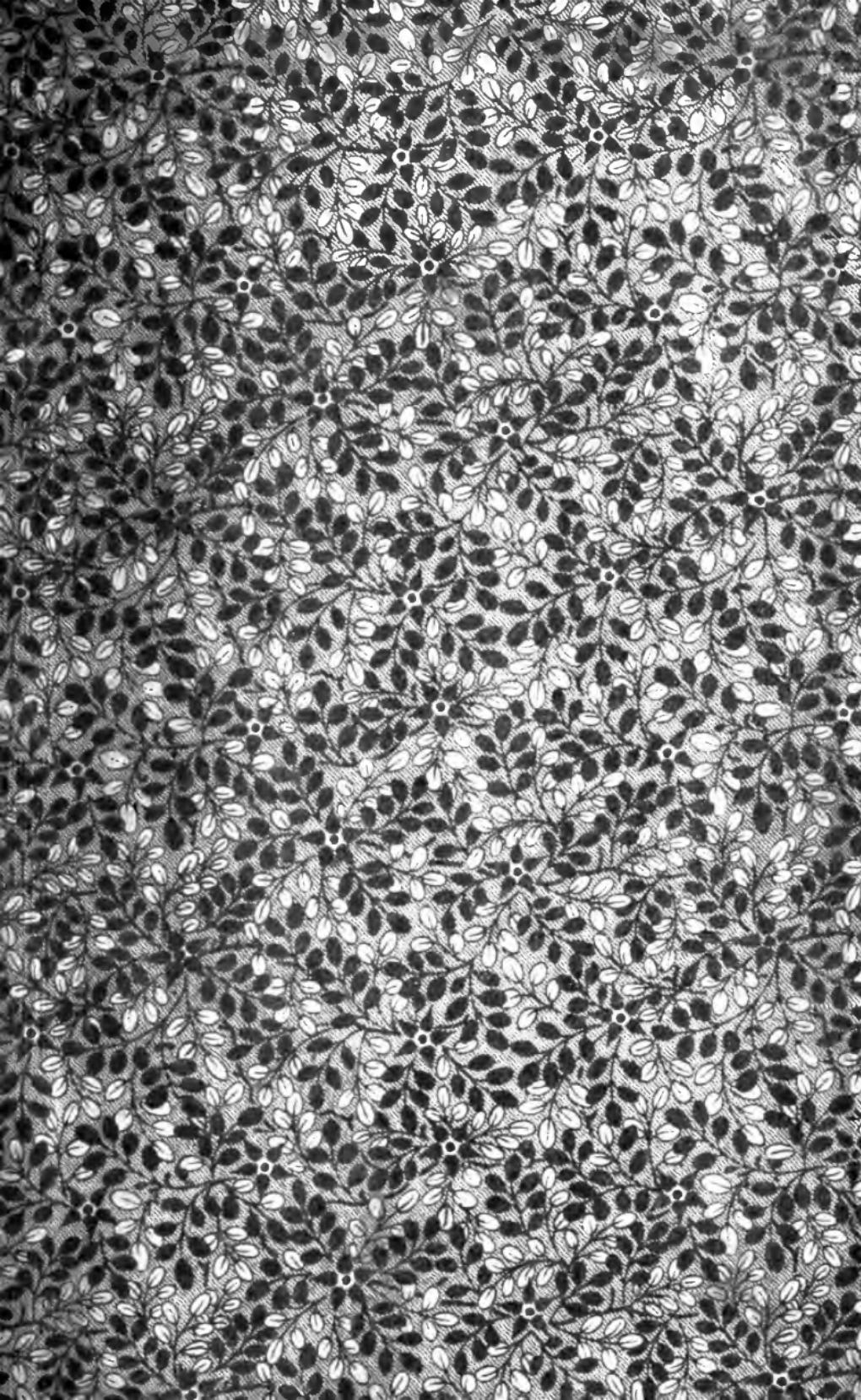
‘Ah! *if* she understood,’ repeated the Surveyor; ‘but don’t you see, my young friend, that is about equivalent to saying, “if the deaf could hear and the lame could walk”? So far as her father’s plans and aspirations are concerned my poor girl is mentally blind; but in that she is only like the rest of her sex. Show a woman a fine house, a splendid equipage, a costly dress, and she appreciates and envies; but speak to her of any great work, any enormous design, and her interest flags at once. It is only when a woman’s love is so great as to raise her above the weakness of her sex that she ever can reconcile herself to become foster-mother to the brain-child of father, husband, or brother; but to love in such a way a woman must in every

sense be great ;' and Mr. Trostdale shook his head so ominously poor Selwyn, though wishful to act loyally by Miss Trostdale, felt discretion to be the better part of valour, and not for the first time that evening held his tongue, though it was pain and sorrow for him to do so. The Surveyor finished his punch in absolute silence. It was only when he rose to go that his feelings found vent : ' Never marry, Serle,' he said, looking about for his coat. ' Never marry if you want to do any good in the world. I married, and——' the pause which followed was more eloquent than a torrent of words. ' No, I won't have you come with me—not even as far as St. George's Hall—not one step. I am in the mood for being alone. Good-night. God bless you. Good-night.'

END OF VOL. I.







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